Thinking through the Surface: A Research-Action Workshop to explore textile craft in the soundscape of war

Duration of the workshop proposed: 2hrs

Claire Barber, University of Huddersfield
Rebecca Gill, University of Huddersfield
Hannah Marples, University of Huddersfield
Stéphanie Prévost, Université Paris Cité/ IUF
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Tim Ingold's evocation of craft as the dynamic interplay of acquired disposition and environment suggests craft is a form of haptic and concentrative knowledge (which Ingold distinguishes from cognitive knowledge) which can engender states of flow and perhaps solace. Yet where Ingold's maker is wonderfully autonomous, the making of craft in wartime was often a survivalist enterprise in the margins of chaos, or obligatory and proscribed by lack of materials. Through this experimental workshop, we will explore the commonplace idea – already in circulation at the time of the First World War – that craft could be therapeutic in times of crises – and confront it with the discordant aural landscape of civilian life in wartime France. Our point of departure is linen drawstring bags crafted and embroidered by French and Belgian displaced women who sought refuge in earshot of the frontlines in the Marne and Meuse during the First World War. These were designed by the Bloomsbury set's Omega studio and created in workshops run by the English Quaker relief mission who explicitly understood these as therapeutic interventions. We hope to invite participants to develop a textile language and shared research agenda committed to exploring the range of possible affective and sensory responses to making textiles in crisis and of engaging the agency of objects more often-than-not treated as ephemera.

The workshop is structured around three moments, which are progressively immersive:

1/ AFFECTIVE OBSERVATION: a brief introduction by convenors will be followed by an object handling session in which we explore together a replica bag created by Hannah Marples, alongside the original photographic record, and invite participants' questions and affective responses.

2/ CRAFTING: HARMONY AND DISCORDANCY: an invitation for participants to experience stitching a small piece against a specially created soundscape evoking the First World War in France and on the south coast of England, where the Omega designers could hear the boom of artillery from across the channel. A partnership with the Jean-Lurçat Textile Museum may be sought to facilitate this moment. No technical skill will be required.

3/ ROUNDING-UP: we will facilitate a discussion over the specificities of the pieces under study (by comparison to other contemporary humanitarian handicrafts, including Belgian 'warlace'), with a view to proposing a first structured analysis of the pieces, reflecting on the experience of stich and sound, and considering how we can

create new knowledge to test the relationship between textile craft and its purported therapeutic benefits.

We hope to keep a record of the workshop through a commissioned photographer and /or a comic strip artist, with the idea that these visual traces can help us understand the creative gestures that may otherwise elude us.

Biographies

Dr. Wendy Wiertz is lecturer of Applied Arts, Design and Material Culture at Utrecht University. Wendy was a Fulbright and honorary Belgian American Educational Foundation fellow at Columbia University (2018-19), an academic visitor at the University of Oxford (2019-2020) and a Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellow at the University of Huddersfield (2021-2023). Her book *Adellijk en artistiek. Amateurkunstenaressen met blauw bloed in België (1815-1914)* (University Press Leuven, 2023) has been awarded the 2021 Prize of the Fonds Keingiaert the Gheluvelt. Her current research project concentrates on war lace and its relations to craft, gender, and humanitarian aid in the First World War era.

Dr Rebecca Gill is a Reader in Modern History at the University of Huddersfield with a special interest in the history of the First World War, refugees and textile art. She is the editor of the forthcoming collections for Manchester University Press: *Humanitarian Handicrafts: History, Materiality and Trade, 1860 – 1960* and *Craft in extremis: survival and creativity during total war, genocide and ethnic violence c. 1890 – 1950*. These collections bring scholars of art, history and anthropology together with curators and textile artists to explore the social and emotional value of textiles, and craft practices, in contexts of war and forced displacement.

Dr Stéphanie Prévost is Senior lecturer in modern British history and culture at Université Paris Cité and a junior member of the Institut universitaire de France. She has extensively published on British-Ottoman C19-relations and *La Bataille de l'opinion: Les Questions d'Orient au Royaume-Uni (1875-vers 1900)* is forthcoming with PUFR. Her current IUF research project focuses on late C19-early C20 practical internationalism and international humanitarianism to refugees. She contributed to the forthcoming edited volumes *Humanitarian Handicrafts* and *Craft in extremis* on pre-1915 Anglo-American industrial relief for Ottoman Armenians. She currently is Visiting Research Fellow at the School of Art and Humanities of the University of Huddersfield.

Dr Claire Barber is an artist and Senior lecturer in Textiles at the University of Huddersfield, as well as the exhibitions officer for the international 62 Group of Textile Artists. For 30 years she has been active in providing meaningful contexts for Textile Art to thrive, including exhibiting, and creating public art commissions in Europe, Australia, Japan and USA. Current research explores the interplay between the tactile language of embroidery with acoustic structures of sound-based work presented in a series of on-going immersive public installations including *XI International Biennial of Textile Art*, Miami International Fine Arts, USA (2025) and *VIII International Triennial of Textile Art*, Szombathelyi Gallery, Hungary (2024).

Hannah Marples is a historic costume maker, embroiderer and gallery co-ordinator based in Nottinghamshire. She makes historically accurate costumes for film, TV, museums, galleries and re-enactors with clients including the BBC, Historic Royal Palaces and Leeds Royal Armouries. Hannah has also digitised historic costuming patterns for publications *The Typical Tudor* and *The King's Servants* by Jane Malcolm-Davies and Ninya Mikhaila. She is currently studying an MA by Research at the University of Huddersfield with a focus on embroidered gauntlet gloves from 1600 to 1630.