I am AccessArt: Ann Rippin

Ann Rippin My name is Ann Rippin and I am a Reader in the Department of Management in the School of Economics, Finance and Management at the University of Bristol. I make textile art as part of the research work I do, and I sometimes include it in my teaching classes. I make large, heavily surface-decorated and embroidered quilts. They are usually about the companies I study such as Marks and Spencer, The Body Shop, Laura Ashley, Starbucks and Nike. I also make artists' books as a way of drawing attention to the fact that we always present our research in academic journals as if it happened in one perfectly thought out unfolding ribbon, whereas, of course, it had stops and starts, diversions, reversals and so on. Finally, I have recently begun making art dolls, mainly as a way of exploring the Laura Ashley brand and its place in the hearts of British quilters.

Waiting for the Warrior I

This is my first Marks and Spencer quilt and alludes to the stories told about the company’s founders. It also features the celebrated knickers including some of the packaging. It folds up like a map.

Nike Goddess Quilt

The Nike ‘swoosh’ becomes the body of a golden peacock in this piece about the company’s attempt to market to women. Hera, the queen of the gods had a chariot drawn by peacocks. The ‘eyes’ are made of photo-transferred highly magnified sports fabrics.

The Starbucks Quilt
Coffee-coloured like the product, this piece explores Starbucks' foundation story and its famous mermaid logo. The quilt explores some of the issues around globalisation and global brands.

I like to use techniques of juxtaposition in my work. This is heavily influenced by the work of Walter Benjamin, a twentieth-century German critical theorist, who, at the end of his life began to think that you shouldn't tell people anything about your research but present them with fragments which they would put together to form their own conclusions. You could drop hints by putting certain things together - like pictures of Elizabeth I and Anita Roddick, the former CEO of The Body Shop, but you couldn't spell things out. I think that textiles are very good for this, particularly if they include graphic elements. They can also be very useful for showing two sides of things, with an inside and an outside, or a front and a reverse. I made a two-ended tippy up doll, like the Red Riding Hood at one end and the Wolf at the other dolls, of Nike with the American dream multinational company

at one end and the child laborer actually making the shoes at the other.

Gorgeous George - The Laura Ashley Doll
I made a series of dolls, including a group of 1970s Laura Ashley husbands. This was more of a fun project than a dedicated scholarly one.

I work largely with a sewing machine, a Bernina which I have had for twenty years and have only ever had serviced once. It deserves some sort of medal. I work a lot by hand, particularly sewing on beads and doing surface embroidery. I really love painting on the finished pieces, it’s a bit like colouring in, but I often use gold paint on top of my free-style machine quilting. I use fluid acrylics which come out of the bottle at the right consistency.

The Bristol Body Shop Panel
This is part of a much larger quilt. The picture is of Anita Roddick and a tribal woman over-quilted and painted with blue bubbles. This is to evoke Bristol and my work with ideas at the University with the thought bubbles and the blue of Bristol's adopted civic colour and its Bristol Blue Glass.

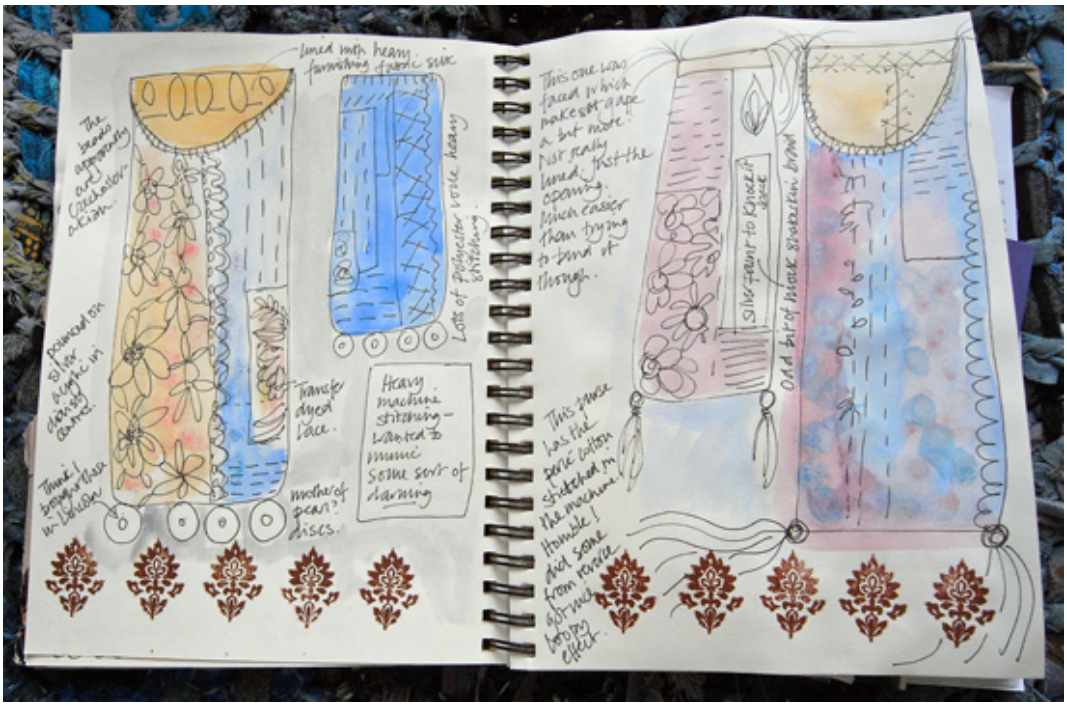
I tend to work in series about whatever company or topic I am

working on. I find this a very useful way of slowing down my thinking, a bit like the Slow Cooking movement, so that I can let my ideas incubate for a while rather than dashing to get them onto paper. At the moment I am working on Laura Ashley and I have made a large quilt showing the importance of her 50p bit bags for a generation of British quilters, a series of mini quilts showing the preciousness of the fabric scraps, a series of narrative pieces of imagined lives of the women who wore the dresses, some Laura Ashley dolls and their husbands, dressed in Laura Ashley fabric showing the biographies of the women I have interviewed in fictionalised forms, and three dolls in vintage-looking dresses exploring the nostalgia in the brand.

Laura Ashley Mini quilts
These are tiny pieces, roughly 15cm long and 7 cm wide. They show how my interviewees treasure even tiny scraps.

I use sketchbooks in the form of project books all the time and I now have a big collection of them. I like A4 books with comb-binding so that the book will lie flat easily. I collect images, make mind maps, record quotations, make working drawings, stick in samples and write commentaries in them. I

am experimenting with making fold-outs and tipped in elements, although I have had no luck with pages with windows cut into them. I am always amazed when I give talks to students and to quilting and embroidery groups how many people seize on the sketch books. They really love them and remember them longer than the finished work. I don't know why this is, but it is consistent across the groups I talk to. I occasionally give classes on making books and I find that one of the key things is generosity with the materials. I am delighted with what people make and the creativity and ingenuity they show in making books tailored to their own needs, and I think this sense of playfulness and experimentation comes from having a lot of stuff to work with, a feeling of abundance. I remember going to an AccessArt sketchbook making session where the tables groaned with materials and I came away with a fantastic sketchbook which I still use as a demonstration piece.



Laura Ashley pockets sketches
These are a record of techniques.

Body Shop sketchbook with ‘found’ landscapes.

Handless Maiden Artists Book
To illustrate the very strange Brothers Grimm story.

A big feature of my work is that I use lot of recycled materials. I am lucky enough to have a contact who makes exquisite curtains - or window treatments - and I often get the sample books and the strips trimmed off the bottom of the drapes after they have been alllowed to hang for hemming

purposes. I have a blogosphere friend who is a historical re-enacter who uses exquisite woven silk and sends me the tiny bits she can't use. My mother sometimes gives me sample cards and remnants from the hosiery industry in my home town, Nottingham. Students, who understand my passion for textiles give me fabric and lace from time to time, and quilters bring me their carefully stashed scraps of Laura Ashley fabric to add to my collection. This means that a lot of my work is made from fabric which would otherwise go into landfill. It is also often sumptuous with a lot of silk, linen and cotton of the very highest standard. I like this element of the work: turning straw into gold.

The Elvis Quilt
Exploring archetypes of masculine and feminine leadership styles.

I find great joy in my work, and am very grateful that my university lets me work in this unorthodox way. I love being able to bring together drawing, painting, stitching and thinking, **Ann Rippin** *Chair of SCOS, Standing Conference on Organizational Symbolism* **http://annjrippin.wordpress.com**