

Stitch to the Future @ The Attic

by Sam Harvey



Kids these days get a bad rap – they apparently spend too long in front of the computer or watching TV; they expect to be famous just for being; they have no concentration span and are the pampered victims of 'helicopter parenting'. One thing is certain: they do have a wider range of influences and many more activities to select from than previous generations. In my (admittedly anecdotal) experience Twenty-First Century children still love to make things and, given the space, time (and permission to make a mess), the myriad of influences become apparent in amazing creations.

A celebration of this creativity and diversity will be held at The Attic art gallery in Pinner in September 2012. The work exhibited will illustrate the variety of interests and influences. There will be cupcakes and computer game inspired characters;

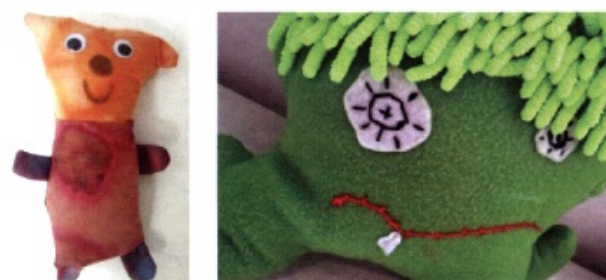
In Stitch clubs and workshops we develop design as well as technical skills. Sometimes the children are making something from an existing pattern and sometimes they start with an individual idea which we develop from a sketch.

Originally Stitch clubs were very controlled: we worked through a prescriptive curriculum which, through a series of projects, introduced or reinforced specific techniques. We started with hand stitching and then move on to the sewing machine. This was based on a franchise business model with a focus on managing the expectations of parents with a demonstrable progression. From my point of view the main advantage of this was that I could pack everything required into the back of the car and travel to different venues. However it soon became apparent that this approach was too restrictive. As the children developed their techniques and expectations it became increasingly difficult to fit enough things into the car to be flexible enough to satisfy the increasingly interesting ideas that were developing. A dedicated Stitch Studio was required.

Since the studio opened two years ago the creativity of the children has escalated – and this is what will be celebrated in the Back to the Future exhibition. The Studio allows for greater flexibility as all the resources and materials are to hand. It is easy to introduce a new technique or material to develop a project. We run 'messy' workshops like dyeing, painting and printing fabrics. Garments and other creations can then be stitched with these unique fabrics.



creatures from imagination and traditional teddies with a twist (this one was made with fabrics dyed by its maker);



and machine embroidered pictures and textile paintings to name a few.



It is still important to know the basic techniques: if you don't secure the threads at the beginning and end of a line of stitching hours of work can be lost when it all falls apart; if you don't draw out and plan what you want to make you can cut up all of your favourite fabric without having a piece the right size; if you know how a sewing machine makes a stitch you can fix a jam more quickly... However, unlike when I was at school and we had to make several sample hems before we made a garment, we now learn through making. Techniques are acquired and applied practically which suits the expectation of immediacy of the twenty-first century child while encouraging them to take their time to make something. For example, traditional embroidery skills are acquired while creating shaped cushions reflecting the individual child's interests.



Sometimes within a group of eight children, eight very different projects will be on the go at once. Although this can be a challenge, the dynamic atmosphere it generates is worth it. As a textile artist I cannot help but be inspired by their creative energy and their different approaches to colour, shape and design.

A popular theme this year has been the fairy toadstool house: as each one was being created someone else was inspired to take the idea further creatively. These each took weeks of work – contrary to the impatient stereotype of the modern child.




Most recently we have been exploring 'e-textile' techniques. An area of interest from my own artwork. We are creating objects that respond interactively. The first critters to be finished are 'Luna the Cat-Girl' and 'Felt Man' – both have eyes that shine when you squeeze their stomachs. Ideas generated while creating these projects will inform the pieces I am making to exhibit alongside the children's work at The Attic.

These two images illustrate the variations which can be achieved when creating critters: the teddy and elephant were made using retro pattern books. The orange critter developed organically from objects found around the studio, the monster is an interpretation of one of my own patterns.

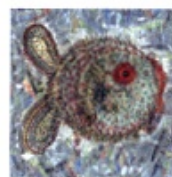


As many expect, most Stitch club members are girls, but we also have some talented boys. The girls are not necessarily future Cath Kidstons: I have had girls who will not touch pink and one of my boys designed and made his mum a dress (she described it as 'very slimming'). Some of the children who come are planning lives as fashion designers, artists and makers – some might indeed become famous, others will have a hobby they can return to as adults. Most importantly they have the sense of well-being which comes from concentrating on making: a great antidote to the pressures of school and time in front of a screen.

What: Stitch to the Future: An exhibition of textile art and design
Where: The Attic at Lines of Pinner
26 High St Pinner, HA5 5PW
When: Sat 15 – Thurs 27 September 2012
Open: Mon-Sat 9am-5:30pm

My Textile Artwork will also be exhibited with the children's work. I use a range of techniques to create stitched and collaged sculptures and pictures which celebrate the texture and quirkiness of the world around us. 

Even if children follow a class pattern they seldom resist the opportunity to personalise it – as can be seen here with a small selection of the variations on a standard pyramid-shaped chicken. It goes without saying that I'm a big fan of the cow! Having the confidence to individualise develops within a group. Children will encourage each other or be inspired by each other's work and then issue challenges to their friends and myself to find and implement new ideas.



More information:
www.stitch-london.co.uk
www.samantha-harvey.com
www.linesofpinner.co.uk/theattic/

