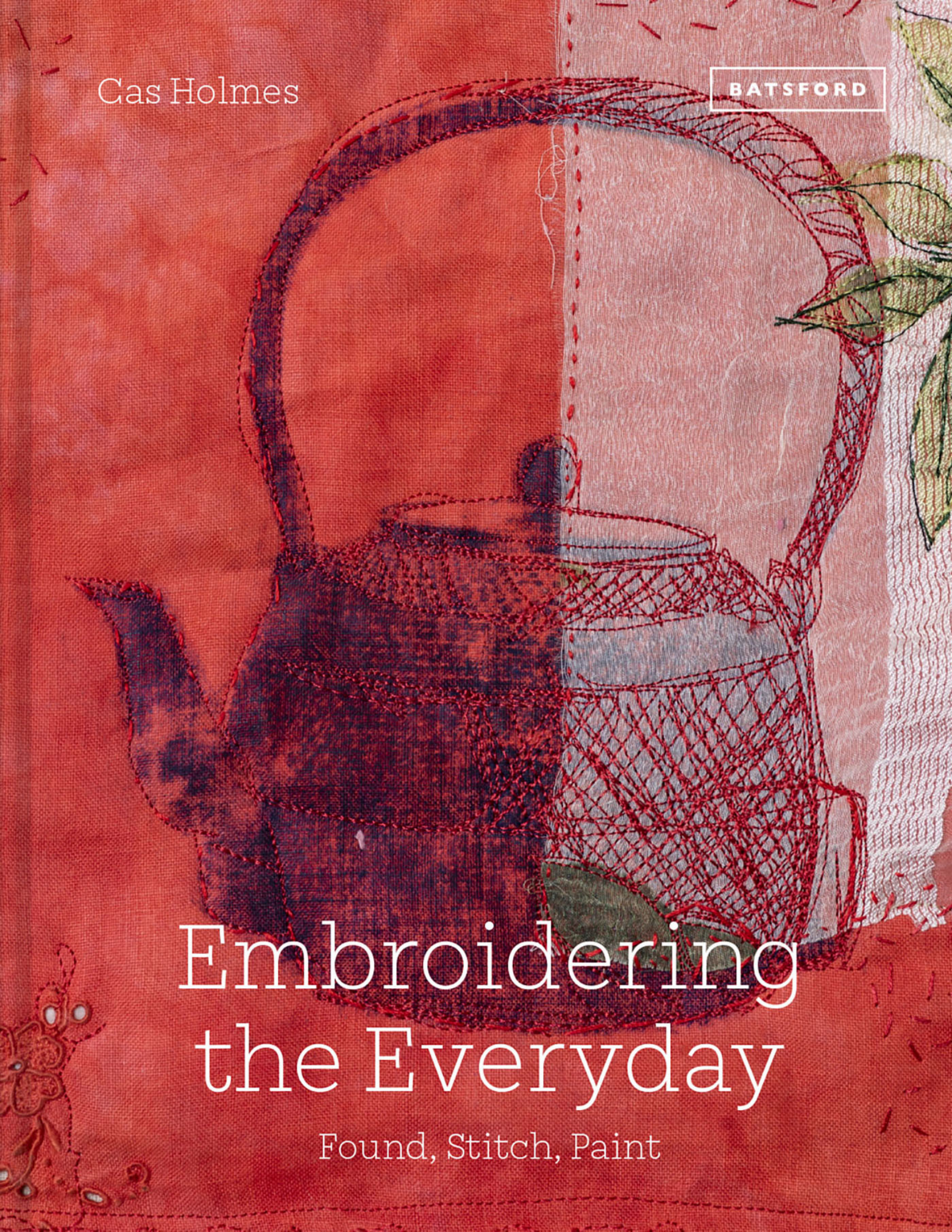


Cas Holmes

BATSFORD



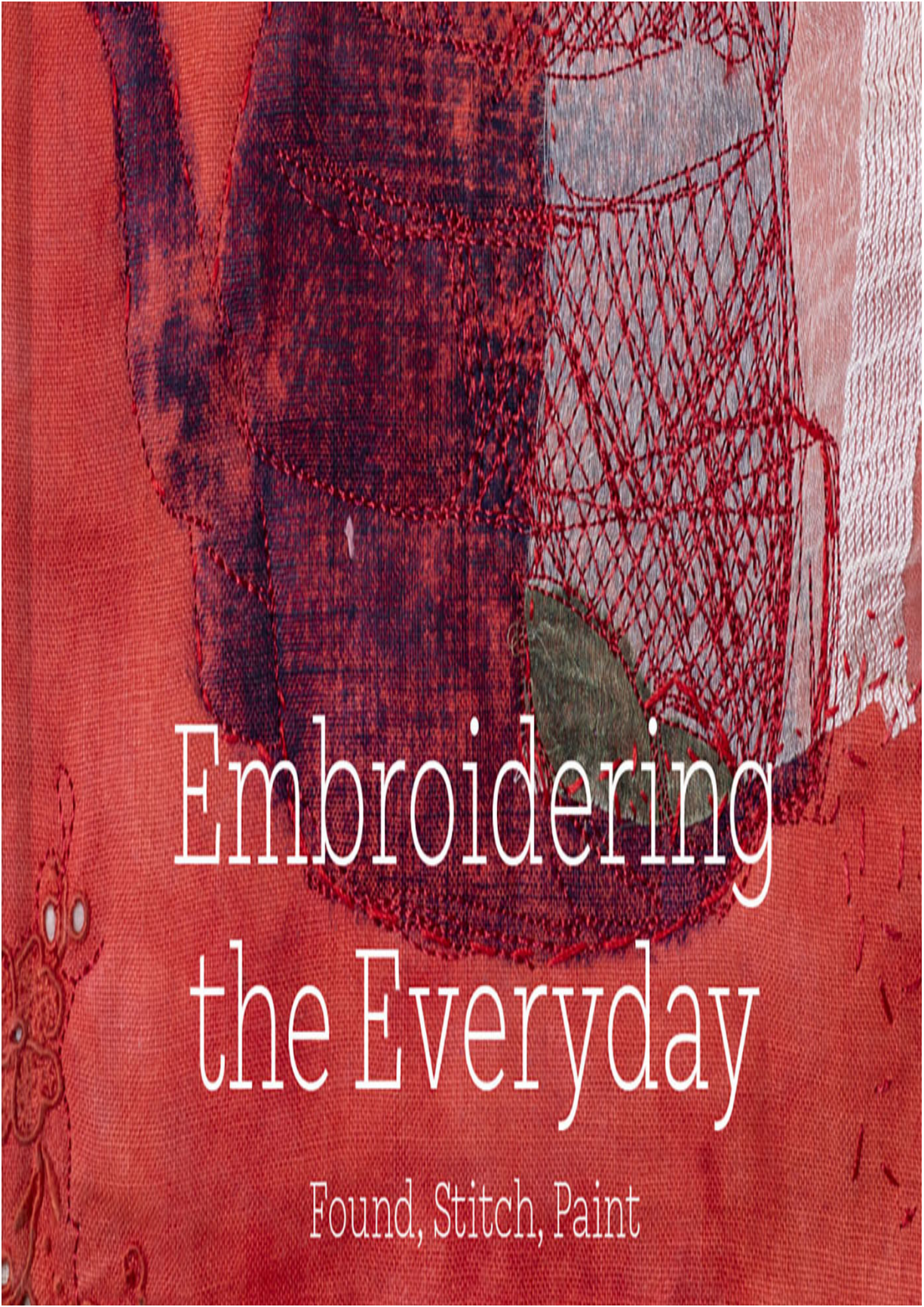
Embroidering the Everyday

Found, Stitch, Paint

Cas Holmes

BATSFORD





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Embroidering
the Everyday:
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Cas Holmes

BATSFORD



Pied Wagtail: Pani Kekkavva (detail)

64 x 164 x 0.5cm (25 x 65 x 1/2 in)

The image is printed onto a sheer organza using blue and black oil paint retrieved from a bin. This has been laid over the background, allowing the colours of the cloth to show through. See [here](#) for the whole piece.

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Foreword

Here are worlds intricately drawn from life, a world made small by close observation. Just as a toddler takes an hour to walk three steps, delighting in each insect, every ripple in a puddle, tightening our focus can be an ongoing exercise in mindful contemplation. Drawing our gaze closer isn't always by choice. Sometimes circumstances changed by all manner of things lead us to engage more intimately with our immediate surroundings, but the art we make can be enriched by it, as these pages demonstrate in glorious detail.

A welcome shaft of sunlight breaking through relentless cloud, illuminating our morning coffee cup, can transform our mood in an instant. The richness of texture in a ripe strawberry tumbling from our shopping bag can make us yearn to render it in stitch. Cas Holmes's daily life is symbiotically entwined with her work. Using oil paint rescued from a bin, she contemplates her sign-writer father's skilled work with the same material. Producing work from materials discovered 'almost by osmosis in my everyday life' she describes this with characteristic lightness of touch as 'a kind of mundane magic'. Depicting, in painterly thread sketches, highlights from the natural world she bicycles through, or a cavalcade of neighbourhood cats pausing in her garden, this essentially nomadic soul finds comfort, delight and inspiration in the everyday, translating it with refreshing immediacy into textile art.

A bag of flour made extra precious by an unexpected food shortage kick starts a stitched musing with an integral pun to cheer in the face of adversity in *Where Has All the Flour Gone?* An innate acceptance and even celebration of

life's imperfections is apparent throughout Cas's approach. Asymmetry is where she lives. Edges are left raw, lines are drawn with refreshing spontaneity.

This is no stylistic affectation, but an authentic representation of how Cas lives and works. Using what is around her, what comes to hand, inspired by her environment, Cas is as likely to print using the biscuit she's been given, as she is to draw it or enjoy it with the cup of tea (which, in turn, yields a tea bag she will later use to dye the pages of her sketchbook). Inspiration for Cas really is all around, even if she's going no further than her kitchen table.

Growing up, Cas walked for hours with her family, immersed in nature. That appreciation of her surroundings percolates through the years, through the generations, and into her work. A sunshine-yellow piece subconsciously references the mustard synonymous with her home city of Norwich, and depicts the plant golden rod that grew abundantly in the woods and heathland where she walked.

A pot-bellied kettle remembered from childhood is re-imagined in textile, speaking of Cas's Romany heritage and re-igniting warm memories of tea with her grandmother. Facilitating and giving talks all over the world, Cas's clearly inherited wanderlust finds expression in the pied wagtail. Also known as the 'gypsy bird', it is at home on the roads – like Cas, it is happy in town and country alike.

Everyday life is a perennial source of imagery and narrative for the camera clicking away in Cas's mind's eye. A magpie in the truest sense, she sees all, considers deeply, saves much, uses carefully. Her output is prolific and profound. In her hands, the prosaic is made poetic.

In this book, you will find not only inspirational examples of Cas's work, her thoughts behind the process, and practical advice on how to relate this to your own creative explorations, but also her handpicked selection of

pieces from other artists who place the everyday at the heart of their work.



Portrait In Great-Grandmother's Shadow
33 x 46cm (13 x 18in)

I have machine and hand stitched a self portrait using sheer cloth and paper over a printed portrait of my great-grandmother. This has been partially cut and torn away so that her face can be seen showing through. A stop-motion short film of this process can be viewed via the QR code.

Using only minimal, accessible materials, but crucially, bags of imagination, determination and an innate respect for and appreciation of what surrounds her as she moves through the world, Cas's everyday life is inextricably interwoven with her art.

We might not all share Cas's irrepressible energy for gathering and utilizing every scrap of visual and actual material from our everyday lives to inform and use in our work, but we can all benefit from considering her approach and integrating it into our own practice.

For Cas, the world really can be seen in a grain of sand, and heaven found in a wild flower. Flour even. That's a little bit of beautiful everyday gratitude we can all enjoy and share.

Deena Beverley

November, 2020

Introduction

“

O wonder!

How many goodly creatures are there here!

How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,

That has such people in't.

”

From The Tempest, Act V, Scene I,

William Shakespeare



Tan-Place (detail), a book form which includes a flower print and text on the cloth bag (a street find) used in the creation of the piece. See the whole piece [on here](#).

There is a wealth of inspiration to be discovered in our connection to the things we can find in our everyday lives, from the domestic items in our homes, to the things we light upon as we go about our daily business or out on a walk. It is just over ten years since my first book *The Found Object in Textile Art* was published, and the content in terms of a 'waste not, want not' ethos continues to inform my creative practice. The patterns of our daily lives have shifted recently as we needed to find new ways of doing things. The slowing down in the spring of 2020 as we responded to the Covid 19 pandemic gave us an opportunity to pause and reflect for a while. That pause came at a time I was considering where my motivations lay as an artist. Work with the Romani Cultural & Arts Company saw a shift

in the direction my work was taking. Our connection to ideas of 'place' (or *tan* in Romani) has always been at the heart of my process, and as I took another look around my own small space and the everyday things within it, I saw an opportunity to explore how this could inform my work.

In her essay 'Blurring Boundaries' Jennifer Harris explores why textiles are the medium of choice when artists examine the overlooked or everyday in society, describing the familiarity of cloth as possessing 'an easily accessed communicative and haptic power' and adding that:

“

Drawing on the everyday associations of cloth as a medium and metaphor can also make the ordinary extraordinary. The everyday, indeed, has a transformative power.

”

*From 'Blurring Boundaries, Textiles and the Everyday',
Embroidery Magazine (July/August, 2020).*

I invite you to share in that exploration and take another look at the often-overlooked things we experience as part of daily life. The imagery and materials found in the simple things around us, the plants and trees in our neighbourhood, the cups and bowls in our homes, provide a rich resource for the artist to use. It could be argued that our connection to the everyday has always had its place in the art we see, from the rich still-life paintings of fruit by Cézanne, to the patterns in the tablecloth they would have sat upon. These simple things reflect social culture and history and are worthy of our attention.

About this book

The guides and instructions throughout this book are not laid out as defined projects, rather, they reflect on the ideas of a minimalist approach as part of a working practice. The techniques and processes are discussed within a broad exploration of themes relevant to the value to be placed on the 'everyday' as a reference, and as a resource in terms of the materials we use. Suggestions for experimentation and sampling are intended for your exploration and can be adapted to your own practice.

In the first chapter 'The Open Road' (see [here](#)), I discuss how the roots of my Romani heritage have informed my creative practice and how the references we make to personal histories through the photographs and objects we retain from the past can provide rich inspiration for us all to work with. Being resourceful with what we have to hand becomes the focus in 'Nomad at Home' (see [here](#)). We delve into the contents of the kitchen cupboard and our homes to find materials and media to use for marking, staining and printing onto cloth, as well as for making improvised printing plates and sketchbooks. How we view things and make connections to each other through a glass pane and the digital screen becomes our focus in 'Windows to the World' (see [here](#)). In 'Changes in the Smaller Landscape' (see [here](#)) we explore the value of the landscape on our doorsteps as a means to map our connection to a given space and the changes we see around us. We look at 'useful tools for discovery' from methods of recording your finds to using items you have collected as a resource for practical work. The value we place on cloth and stitch in connection to our memories and to each other is discussed in 'Threads of Connection' (see [here](#)). We explore the nature of 'open sampling' to create 2D, 3D and installation pieces using plastics, recycled cloth and the use

of text. 'Displacement and Discovery' in the final chapter (see [here](#)) reflects upon the things we learn from our experience of being in different places to create work that often has similar considerations and ideas about the world we live in and share. We consider how familiar objects can appear different in other places and reflect upon our relationship to the planet we inhabit for a time.

Note

Romany and Romani are correct spellings and interchangeable in common usage and are used as such throughout this book.

The content is infused with the ideas and thoughts of some of the leading artists in the world of textile art who generously allowed their work to be included. This book asks us to explore with enquiring and observing minds, and to develop our creative ideas while using fewer resources.



The Downs Wind Torn
170x 177cm (67 x 70in)

Three panels exhibited in 'For the Love of Gaia' at the International Quilt Museum (Nebraska, 2020). Painted, dyed and printed cotton, linen and paper layered with block prints and mono-print drawings. Materials found on location near Maidstone. Free machine stitch combined with hand stitch on a torn, quilted, collaged and distressed surface.

Drom: The Open Road

Drom roughly translates as 'the road', and also means the way or 'the path you travel along' in the Romani language.





Travelling gently

My fraternal grandmother talks about her everyday life on the road as a Romani child. The places where her family stopped and worked are part of my history. The fields where she once picked fruit and hops are part of my regular cycle route in Kent. I often walk along the North Norfolk coast paths and the broad estuary of the Wash when visiting family, and have visited the back lanes and markets of Norwich where my great-grandmother once touted crocheted table mats and lace ware, as part of my route home from school. I live in a small house on the outskirts of Maidstone, and by any description may be perceived as a 'settled' member of the community. However, my art practice and lifestyle choice contradicts this. I travel in pursuit of my work, drawing, stitching, collecting and collating things as I go. I don't own a car; you could say I 'walk the world'. My main mode of transport is on foot or by bicycle. This immediately connects me to the places I travel through, taking in the stories of people, culture and place along the way. My way of thinking and my approach to my work is constantly in motion and being challenged by this daily exchange with the 'world outside'.



Pied Wagtail: Pani Kekkavva (one of a triptych)
64 x 164 x 0.5cm (25 x 65 x ½ in)

This work portrays my great-grandparents, referencing the last photographic evidence of my immediate family. The ancient ties to India are represented in the colours and the reclaimed sari materials used in the making of the artwork. In printing the images for this series I used oil paints retrieved from a bin. My father trained as a sign-writer and decorator and used oil paints for his beautiful painted shop signs. A detail of the wagtail appears here.

“

We travelled gently along the road and lanes by our two horse-drawn caravans, the vardo and the Leeds wagon. Usually we made our way from village to village, our stops were made on 'pull-ins' in the quiet lanes or our regular Stopping Places. I remember picking spring daffodils and tulips in fields near Spalding, the area called Little Holland. In Kent we picked apples, plums and hops. We saw the Irish Sea, the North Sea, the Wash and the Channel, the Cheviots, the Pennines, the Downs and the Lakes. Romanis still travelling follow the same routes, gathering in the old familiar places.

”

From 'Memories of a Romani Childhood', Mary Holmes (1994). Share Your Memories writing competition, Norfolk County Council, Library and Information.

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