

# Prism 2007

## STITCH! DRAW!

The Mall Galleries, London

6–10 February 2007

THE CROWD jostled for space at Prism's annual show at the Mall Galleries. Many clutched notebooks, lifting corners to peep behind exhibits – oblivious of the 'do not touch' signs. With more than 300 new works by 65 artists, there was a lot to see. Add four guest artists – embroiderer Shizuko Kimura, quiltmaker Joan Schulze, performance artist Caroline Morris and sculpted body pieces from Diane Bateson – and there was an eclectic feel to the exhibition.

Prism, founded by Julia Caprara, draws its members from students, tutors and associates of the Opus School of Textile Arts. Its aim is 'to encourage the development of textile works which demonstrate professional integrity of the highest order'. This year's theme was drawing. As textile artists we stitch, but why draw? – And how is it valid to the creative experience? The artists were invited to contribute drawings in support of their textile works.

Kay Swancutt showed her sketchbook for a series of textile drawings inspired by horizons. Intriguing word lists accompanied her charcoal sketches and sparked another question. How important is writing to the creative process? The quiet pieces of dyed, stitched and patched fabric in earthy browns and blues that resulted from these explorations were fascinating because of the journey she allowed us to share.

Magpie Seven, also known as performance artist Caroline Morris, delighted listeners with a tour of her arcane miniature exhibits from her *Museum of Curiosities*. Here was golden thread spun by Rumpelstiltskin and a fragment of Penelope's shroud woven for Laertes. The printed souvenir guide



that accompanied her monologue of fairy tales, showed meticulous attention to detail, a reminder how important presentation is to a finished work.

With no catalogue, navigating the show was a challenge. This made me look at the work rather than the technique.

A title and price tag accompanied each exhibit and last year's colourful Prism folio, with artist's statements, was on sale.

Tucked in one of the small rooms I found Pat Selman's *Menagerie* of stitched mythical creatures. 'Her work is so joyful' was one comment. Indeed it was. She also showed her surreal quotation drawings. *God could not be*

Top: Valerie Huggins, *Early Frost*

Above: Susie Vickery, *Yak Butter Tea*

*everywhere so he made mothers was just a spare line of stitch on calico.*

I wanted to run away with Pinkie Robert's *Standing Proud*. Her six life studies of female nudes were exquisitely executed in a subtle form of appliqué. Luminous reds, blues and yellows, plus the stitched line that suggested the curvaceous forms, perfectly married the two themes of the show.

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