



Anne Griffiths – Contemporary Textile Art – October 2014 Newsletter

Dear All,

I must start by telling you a bit about my trip to St. Petersburg, one of the most beautiful European cities, whose skyline is totally unspoilt by any kind of modern architecture.

We saw for ourselves the numerous palaces, canals and golden domed churches which are as extravagant and breathtaking as they appear in all the guidebooks, but we were also taken on a tour of the city by a friend of our host who is a professional tour guide and studied Dostoyevsky at university. He took us to see some of the tenement buildings in those at the other end of the social scale existed, some only affording to rent a share in the corner of a room which allowed protection from the elements for perhaps an hour or two every day. One such building was the flat where Raskolnikov was supposed to have murdered Alyona Ivanovna in Crime and Punishment, a grim building with its central staircase, even on a bright sunny day, it needed little imagination to taste the fear and panic Raskolnikov would have felt as he hid in the dark doorway.

The tour ended on a brighter note, with an invitation to our host's mother's house. Elena Shnaider is a textile artist, who cuts and prints from the most delicate stencils. She learnt her skills from her mother who was self taught and came to St. Petersburg after the war, working on the restoration of some of the great palaces.

Most of the fabrics she makes are used for wall coverings and upholstery with up to 100 stencils cut for a single piece. It was interesting to hear that she only uses oil paints feeling that they give her much more vibrant colours than acrylic based paints. I think you can see the delicacy of her cutting from this image of her with stencil and printed fabric behind.



She made us tea and spent about 2 hours showing and describing her work, which was a little lost in translation but absolutely fascinating. She gave me one of her pieces, a handkerchief on which she has stencilled a design which shows a different image when the hankie is open and when it is folded. The most beautiful and treasured memento from the visit.



Elena has made work for many of the great palaces including the Hermitage. I felt honoured when I visited later to see it used in this upholstery fabric in the Neoclassicism Room.

This furniture was a style popular in Russia in about 1910 using a combination of the Classical and Art Nouveau styles however the original fabric had

deteriorated completely and was reimagined from contemporary drawings.

It was no coincidence that I was in St. Petersburg during the showing of the biennial European contemporary art exhibition Manifesta 10 (the 10th show) which was spread over several locations. I saw some fantastic new art and work by artists I had heard of but never seen.

One of the locations used for the exhibition was the General Staff Building built between 1820-30 by Carlo (Karl Ivanovich) Rossi using the triumphal arch to join together two separate buildings. Originally, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were located in the Eastern Wing and the General Staff occupied the Western wing. Today after extensive and imaginative refurbishment incorporating stunning glass and steel architecture which was completed at the end of 2013, the East wing is part of the Hermitage Museum and the West wing is used as the headquarters of Leningrad military region.

There were some immense pieces of work exhibited here, including one by [Thomas Hirschhorn](#) (shown right) who has the cut façade of a large apartment block. You gaze



into six rooms spread across two floors and the modest interiors are typically furnished with couches, coffee tables and televisions. The only sign of their difference is that on the walls hang original works by Malevich, Filonov and Rozanova - forgotten history made visible and presented by Hirschhorn as a homage to the Russian avant-garde.



There were also textiles, amongst them [Timur Nivikov's](#) huge “flags” from the series 'Horizons'.

Following his first trips to the West, in 1989 he founded the "Neoacademism" art movement, which opposed modernism and promoted preservation and regeneration of classical art. For Novikov, “universal” always meant “common”, something suitable for everyone, easily digested and intended to last forever.

This piece 'A Deer' 1988 is acrylic on textile and measuring 184cms x 187cms is a tribute to his philosophy, it is as fresh today as it was when it was created, stunningly beautiful in its simplicity.

In the Hermitage was work by [Yasumasa Morimura](#), an appropriation artist and photographer whose work I am particularly interested in but had never seen before. His work is a commentary on the reversals of perspective and the liminality of states, male/female, past/future, adult/child, east and west. Often resurrecting historical portraits, he adopts the identity of 'celebrities' turning them into self-portraits and questioning the position of painting within modern art when a photographic image can be captured, digitally enhanced and reproduced in a fraction of the time it would take to create the painted portrait.

In this body of work created for the biennial he takes drawings by Soviet artists Vera Milyutina and Vasily Kuchumov who recorded the empty Hermitage during World War II, when over a million artworks had been removed for safekeeping.



Morimura has reproduced a selection of these drawings through photography, and, dressed as a wartime artist has placed himself inside the images alongside the empty frames of these artworks.

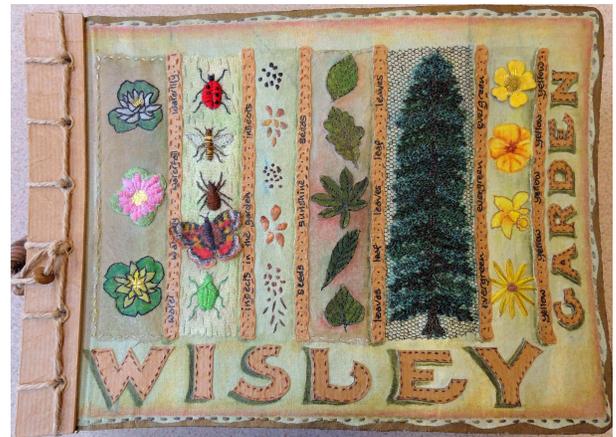
Before I spend the whole newsletter discussing St. Petersburg, I have been doing some work.



I mentioned in the previous newsletter, the textile map project for Ashbury village I have been working on.

Following a series of workshops, the background is nearing completion and the first scenes of houses, animals, local events and personalities are beginning to arrive. This horse is one of my favourites, appliquéd onto a background of woven mohair with simple embroidered “fence” border and grass it is absolutely lovely. You can see many more of the pieces and keep up to date with the project at [Ashbury Textile Hanging](#).

I must also say a big thank you to the members of Woking Embroiderers Guild who made me so welcome when I went to talk about the 'Alice in Wonderland' hangings and other [“Stories in Stitch”](#). It was a pleasure to meet everyone and see the beautiful embroidered guild flag and the textile book that had been put together from their visits to Wisley Gardens, it was a real inspiration.



I have been so pleased with the distance learning work that has come in again this month and would like to say thanks to all the people who take the trouble to look and comment on the work, I can remember how hard it was when I was doing a distance learning course to know if I was doing things “right” so it is really encouraging to get feedback. Here are the units from this month Pamala Page, [Unit Five](#), Celia Watkinson, [Unit One](#) and Vicky Sander, [Unit One](#).

I know I have talked about a lot of work in St. Petersburg in this newsletter, but there are some great exhibitions on all over the country at the moment both contemporary art and more classical. As well as the [Liverpool biennial](#), there is

[Maisie Broadhead's](#) Peeper's show at the Brighton Pavilion and in London
[Malevich](#) at Tate Modern and the Royal Academy has the [Anselm Kiefer](#)
alongside [Giovanni Moroni](#) both of which are absolutely wonderful. If you can't
make it, Tate and the RA have some really interesting video footage and bulletins
about the artists. But more of those next month and until then ...

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anne". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letter being a large, stylized capital 'A'.