

# Fathoming the depths

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Fathoming the depths  
Master of Design (Hons) 2010

Alison Muir

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# Abstract

## **Fathoming the depths**

Keywords: textiles, design, communication, information, water

In the early twenty-first century, creative practice uses textiles to project a voice into the world and to inform on issues of importance.

*Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles* was an exhibition of 12 stitched textile banners, which used a combination of image and text in accordance with W. J. T. Mitchell's Picture Theory, to transform published and scientific advice into informative designs about the environmental and social issues of water in the Sydney Basin. The public design project simultaneously reflected on the deep ecology of water, recycling and the water cycle.

Three different locations exhibited the stitched textile banner exhibition and collected questionnaire responses to the document that proposes that '*An understanding of information design and audience comprehension in an exhibition setting can inform the textile's ability to communicate an environmental message, particularly about water.*'

This paper documents the use of textiles as a message medium, how a theoretical framework and design theories can inform information design using textiles, and the serendipitous results of analysis of the textile medium in order to deliver the subtle nuances of an environmental message.

*'Great to see people using recycled materials as the source of their art/designs. We need to, as artists and designers, become sustainable and aware of our wastefulness,'* this statement was made by an anonymous respondent at the Sydney Quilt and Craft Show Darling Harbour, in June 2008.

The research informed the development of a textile design exhibition entitled: *Fathoming the depths: informative textiles*. This exhibition of five textiles used the sensory power of transparency and fluidity of the material adding to the context of the social and environmental issues: the politics of water.

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Expertise Events very generously provided the space for the *Fresh and Salt: messages in stitched textiles* exhibition to be included within the Sydney Quilt and Craft Show at Darling Harbour in 2008. The experience was invaluable, thank you Judy Newman.

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# Definition of terms

**Alison Muir's stitched textiles:** my textiles to date have technically drawn on the traditions of appliqué and quilting, with some collage, although techniques were used to design individual visual images and express my opinions. The construction of three layers held together by stitch anchors through the appliqué adds weight, dimension and line work to the stitched textiles (Finnegan 2005).

**Appliqué:** is when a patch of fabric is sewn onto a backing cloth (Rolfe 1998).

**Art Quilt:** Through quilting, artists transform the functional structure and patterns, stitches produce sculptural lines and colours and images are achieved through dyes, printing methods, appliqué and other exploratory methods (Shaw 1995).

**Art Quilt (2):** Studio Art Quilt Associates in USA (SAQA) define an 'art quilt' as a contemporary artwork exploring and expressing aesthetic concerns, common to the whole range of the visual arts: painting, printmaking, photography, graphic design, assemblage and sculpture, which retains, through materials or technique, a clear relationship to the folk art quilt from which it descends (Associates 2009).

**Audience:** is defined as the group of spectators in an attendance at events that listen, view and are reached by the information presented. A second definition includes people who want the results of this research.

**Banner:** is a textile usually suspended from a pole and used in the marching tradition to identify a group such as a trade union, friendly society or political organisation (Ilhany 1966).

**Data:** is the raw information provided in a questionnaire before analysis.

**Deconstruction:** Theory of criticism to expose surface meaning (Jencks 1986).

**Double coding:** the combination of modern techniques with additional techniques (usually traditional techniques) (Longbottom 1999).

**Embroidery:** The Dictionary of Textiles (2002) defines this to be: 'to embroider is to decorate a textile base with stitch, either by hand or with a machine, or on a frame, producing one or several designs, using varied threads.'

**Findings:** the overall meaning of the research expressed as descriptive and interpretative statements (Riley 1996).

**Fused appliqué:** also known as ‘raw edge appliqué’. The technique uses an iron-on adhesive such as vliesofix, to fuse one layer of textile to another surface without the need for turned under edges and edge stitching.

**Imagertext:** a composite synthetic work that combines image and text (Mitchell 1994).

**Legitimation:** based on logical reasoning, reasonable ideas (Gottdiener 1995).

**Messages:** are the information value to the respondents having viewed the stitched textile banners, for example, at the exhibitions *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles*. Messages are also the few main points in the author’s interpretation (Riley 1996).

**Metaphor:** something used, or regarded as being used to represent something else, an emblem or symbol (Hodder 1989).

**Metonymy:** a figure in which an attribute or adjunct is substituted for the thing that is meant, i.e., an image of water can be seen as a symbol of relaxation (Hodder 1989).

**Paradigm:** set of assumptions, concepts, values and practices that constitute a way of viewing reality for the community that shares them—through an intellectual discipline (Jencks 1986).

**Patchwork:** or piecing, means to seam two patches of fabric together by a hand running stitch or a machine stitch (Rolfe 1998).

**Picture Theory:** and ‘The Pictorial Turn’ looks at the way modern thought has re-orientated itself around visual paradigms. This theory looks at pictures theoretically and the theory itself as a form of picturing (Mitchell 1994).

**Qualitative data:** data that cannot readily be summarised in the form of numbers, more often recorded in words (Riley 1996).

**Quantitative data:** data that can be summarised in numbers, often as counts of the number of respondents who make a choice in a questionnaire (Riley 1996). The quantitative study in this case is the questionnaire designed to test the hypothesis with the sample of respondents who are the audience of *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles*.

**Quilt (rug):** in Australia, is a bedcover with one, two or three layers. It is not limited to the three-layered sandwich of top, wadding and a back, quilted together as defined by the American quilters (Rolfe 1998).

**Quilt (2):** a quilt is a stitched, layered textile incorporating any material and employing any technique (Ozquilt Network Inc).

**Quilting:** is the hand or machine stitching used to hold layers of cloth together to form a quilt (Rolfe 1998).

**Reference information:** information about the source of the data such as name of the respondent, date and place of the record (Riley 1996).

**Respondent:** a participant who talks or writes to the researcher (Riley 1996).

**Semiotics:** is the role of 'signs' in society; a 'sign' being something that stands for something else and has two separate components– a signifier and a signified (Gottdiener 1995).

**Signature style:** is when the visual language is distinguishably from an individual or business (Bonnici 1999).

**Synecdochal:** a sign is where a whole is represented by a part, i.e., the Sydney Harbour Bridge is often used as a synecdoche for the City of Sydney (Rose 2001).

**Tapestry:** is a weaving technique that produces a patterned or pictorial cloth in which discontinuous wefts are placed in a weft-faced weave. Usually working at a tapestry loom, the weaver manipulates the coloured wefts to create images. Definition is derived from [www.american Tapestry Alliance.org](http://www.american Tapestry Alliance.org).

**Totemism:** is the use of totems or symbols of knowledge, i.e., Aboriginal totems (Hodder 1989).

**Validity:** The extent to which data records the significant features of the respondents' answers to the questionnaires.

**Wet abstract:** is a term developed as part of this research where a water idea/subject is abstracted, treated non-representatively and includes 'imagetext'.

## CHAPTER 1

## Introduction: why textiles and water?

**1.1. Research proposition**

With reference to current scholarship, the focus of this investigation reveals the ability of textiles to deliver informative messages to an audience. Textiles have the ability to reveal the embedded, mapped layers of culture, context and a unique form of rhetoric. *Fathoming the depths* investigates how textiles can map the invisible landscapes of politics, ecology and the natural environment in an exhibition context.

The proposition for this research is:

*'An understanding of information design and audience comprehension in an exhibition setting can inform the textile's ability to communicate an environmental message, particularly about water.'*

The research investigates the ability of the textile medium, excluding costume, to communicate messages of a political, social and environmental nature, particularly about water. The examination considers historical textiles and the current scholarship, documenting contemporary designers' use of mediums for messages. Recent international exhibitions include— textiles in opposition to the war on terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan: the politics of an environment.

To enable a pragmatic assessment of audience comprehension, 12 stitched textile banners have been designed, produced and exhibited as *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles*. At three separate exhibition installations, what the audience saw or understood about the water messages and the textile medium was under subject of voluntary questionnaires. The results of the questionnaire analysis displayed a shift in knowledge and attitude to water in the Sydney Basin<sup>1</sup> (Service 2003) and the ability of the textile medium to present current and topical messages to audiences.

*Fathoming the depths: informative textiles*, is an exhibition of textiles designed, produced and exhibited in May 2010, that has incorporated developments in informative textile design because of the research in this document. These exhibition textiles

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<sup>1</sup> The Sydney Basin is the biogeographical region bounded by the New England Fold belt to the north, Gunnedah Basin to the northwest, Lachlan Fold Belt to the southwest and the edge of the Continental shelf in the South Pacific Ocean to the east.

illustrated the textiles' fluidity, transparency and ability to map layers of meaning, in the context of their capacity to present messages about the politics of water. The communicative power of the final body of textiles is a testament to this research.

Sections 1.3 Research significance and Part 2: Studio Practice, explain the extent and significance of the exhibitions and research.

## 1.2. Research structure

The scholarly style document includes the Harvard method of citation, and Endnote for the bibliography. The Research structure is divided into two parts in order to distinguish the two areas of research: Research Document and Studio Practice. These in turn are linked together to respond to the proposition. Each chapter includes an introduction and conclusion, covering the relevant component of research.

The document, the textile banners and exhibitions developed concurrently so that the research into audience and visual communication informed the design development of both the textiles and exhibitions.

In discussing textiles, references do not include costuming, widely documented, but concentrate on one-off textiles, yardage and designed textiles from Western history and Western nations, in particular Australia, the UK and the USA.

An outline of the document follows:

The Introduction explains the context of why we are investigating textiles and water and looks at the scope of the Master of Design project.

### PART 1: Research document

Five chapters comprise Part 1, including the Introduction. These refer to the use of historical and contemporary textiles as a literature review under the headings of *'The common thread'* and *'Message in the medium'*, both being a reference to the multilayered ability of textiles to deliver information and become communication channels. Chapter 4: *'Layers of meaning'* defines the impacts of the theoretical framework and visual design theory research on the design development of the textile banners and the exhibition design for the Fresh and salt exhibitions. Chapter 5 delivers the questionnaire results, *'Information outfall'*, from the audience questionnaires at the three exhibitions. A research conclusion summarises the findings of Part 1.

### PART 2: Studio Practice

Part 2 comprises of four chapters and a conclusion to the studio component, which documented using a reflective writing style. Chapter 7 introduces my textile practice prior to 2006. Chapter 8, *'Fresh and Salt'* documents the banners for the audience enquiry. Chapter 9, *'Fluidity and transparency'* discusses the practice based research and Chapter 10 *'Fathoming'* looks at the relationship between the research, Studio

Practice and the development of new textiles for assessment. A reflective conclusion: *'Watermarks'* completes Part 2: Studio Practice.

The document includes two Bibliographies:

- Exegesis Bibliography for Part 1; and
- Textile Bibliography for textiles designs and Part 2.

### 1.3. Research significance

Sonja Andrew in her paper *'Textile semantics: communication-based reading of textiles'* (Andrew 2008: p. 62) comments that contemporary practitioners show awareness of the communication potential of textiles, but that this communication is not always a constructed intent within the work. Andrew concludes in her article that, *"Further inquiry into the communicative capacity of textiles is necessary to ascertain if the practitioner's communication intention is understood by the viewer."*

Apart from Andrew's research as above, only limited research is available on the communication value of textiles, which are not just a by-product of evaluation within fashion.

The intention is that this research finds an audience in academia, practitioners, curators and policymakers. The use of textiles as a form of communication on the 'politics of an environment' creates another medium for the message. This document discusses textiles as an information and communication medium.

The results from this research contribute to knowledge through:

- An interpretation of how people interact with textiles that have a message;
- Extend existing research by contextualising textiles as a communication medium;
- Challenging the traditional associations of textiles; and
- An alternative methodological approach to published information as a way of exploring textile practice.

### 1.4. Background to the study

A chance comment from a friend of my father, Alan Clarke, at the 2005 solo exhibition *Aquamarine: recent textiles* by Alison Muir initiated this research. Alan Clarke's comment was *"I didn't really want to see another quilt exhibition, it is not my thing but these are more than quilts. I actually get what she is trying to say about water in Sydney and the work is really stunning and clever. It has multiple messages"* (Huskins 2006: pers.comms).

The background to water in the Sydney Basin shows that Australians have "the highest water use per person on earth" (Hall 2006), and while this still remains the case, the provision of fresh drinking water will remain an issue that attracts both political and consumer dynamics.



Australia is “the driest inhabited continent on earth” (Department of Agriculture 2006). It is a continent surrounded by salt water and is a dumping ground for discarded treated and untreated stormwater and sewage. Yet, 75 per cent of Australians live within 50 kilometres of the coast; in cities with inadequate sewage systems (ABC 2006), and wish to sail on water, bathe in it, surf on it, fish in it and have it freely available in pristine condition for their use at all times. This is known in Western terms as ‘*open access*’ (Sharp 2002: p. 9).

The fresh water available on the Australian continent is developing higher levels of salinity through logging and disruption of the natural watercourses, due to the production of food and the storage of fresh drinking water (Smith 2006).

Since the late 1980s, there has been an increase in the number of artists using the textile medium and highlighting water and environmental issues in their work (Murray 1999). Contemporary textiles are a medium used to express personal ideas, thoughts and feelings about the world as evidenced by the 2004 exhibition ‘*Special interests: the art of politics*’, exhibited at the San Jose Museum of Quilts and Textiles, USA. This exhibition of textiles included overt political and social commentary on the environment, war, peace, personal choice and gun lobbying.

Stitched textiles are a medium I have used since early 1990 to express issues of importance about the environment and about water in particular. As described by Dianne Finnegan in the catalogue for ‘Aquamarine: recent textiles by Alison Muir’ my “*textiles generate attention by the use of an intensely coloured beautiful image which has a sting in the title generally of a political nature*” (Finnegan 2005: p. 7).<sup>2</sup>

The issues of water illustrated in the textiles for this enquiry are about the ownership, control, and commodification of water itself, water production, water infrastructure, distribution, water rights and the financing of water at the macro-level: in short—the politics of water.

### 1.5. Research methodology

The subject explored in this research is the audience’s comprehension of the communication value of ‘water’ related information presented on exhibited textile banners.

The purpose of the feedback was to assess the use of textiles as a viable medium for the communication of political and environmental messages in the twenty-first century. More specifically, we wanted to ask the questions: ‘Could textiles deliver messages on the issues of fresh and salt water in the Sydney Basin? If so, how have they reflected the issues/tensions in a textile medium? Is this message congruent or coherent? How does the audience receive the communication? How might interpretative feedback show a shift in audience attitude or beliefs and/or future behaviour? Will respondents look for textiles to be a message medium in the future?’

---

2 Refer to Part 2, Chapter 7 ‘the quilt and other textiles’ for my earlier textile work.

Literature searches and press discovery, amongst other methodologies were used to develop this project and for the development of the topical water subjects presented on the stitched textile banners. The research orientation was to develop an audience based qualitative and quantitative analysis to provide input into the practice led research methodology and development of new textiles; discussed in more detail in the relevant chapters in the body of the document.

### 1.5.1. Textile banner subjects

The design and production of 12 stitched textile banners have been contextualised using published newspaper and internet articles about fresh and salt-water issues in the Sydney Basin, collected progressively from January 2006 to December 2008. This information defined the design subjects for each banner and the Studio Practice research, as referred to in Chapter 8 *'Fresh and salt'*.

Chapter 8.4 *Water publications and subjects* have expanded on the methodology in detail. A separate Textile Bibliography for the newspaper and internet references follows the Exegesis Bibliography. The Literature Review research<sup>3</sup> influenced the decision to make textile banners. The use of a banner combined 'image and text' in these banners, allowed for a change, innovation and an appreciation of the political, social and economic environment communicated.

### 1.5.2. Textile banner and exhibition design theory

A number of authors on the subjects of visual language, information design and reading images have provided insight into the process of developing and translating popular press words into textile designs consisting of 'imagetext' for this project.

The design research is grounded in Picture Theory (Mitchell 1994), with a discussion on the passing of postmodernism.

Alternatively, the introduction of a philosophy, where the picture and its symbolic language is sufficient to inform the rapidly moving information world of the twenty-first century, is highly appropriate.

In theory, information messages can use ideas, words, images and symbols as vessels of communication. There have been two kinds of symbolic images in Western culture: subjective images with a central perspective (a point of view) and objective images without a perspective but which reveal everything about the represented idea (Kress 1996).

The functions of images have three capacities (Fitzgerald 2002), these being: to elicit emotion or try to encourage emotional reaction, motivate and encourage a behavioural response and model an idea as it provides a description to help visualise something that cannot be directly observed.

---

3 Figure 2: Banner of the Swan Hill branch of the Australian Natives Association May 1907 from the Swan Hill Pioneer Collection. (233cm high x 135cm wide).

Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen in their tome *'Reading Images: the Grammar of Visual Design'* (Kress 1996), look at the types of images in Western society through the meaning of the composition, how the modality markers function and the semiotics of colour.

The meaning of the composition relates to the representational and interactive meanings of the image through three interrelated systems: information value, salience and framing.

Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen identify modality markers as the components of value to visual language. These include colour, contextualisation, representation, depth, illumination, brightness, text and colour semiotics.

The type of image, the function of the image, the meaning of the composition and the modality markers have been used as a format to analyse historical and contemporary textiles as part of the literature review for this project.

To facilitate an innate understanding of the sensory and tactility of textiles, I repeat the writings of Michael Brennand-Wood, in his discussion on the *'Ties that bind'* (Millar 2007) when he explains that, *"Textiles are, if nothing else about the accessing of information via sensory engagement, touch, feel, scent, sight and sound. We understand deeper levels of meaning in greater depth through the employment of both our sensory and intellectual selves."*

The *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles*, banners and exhibition have used the same framework to develop the designs. The design of the long cloth textiles for *Fathoming the depths: informative textiles* also included the analysis of the audience questionnaires.

Chapter 4: *'Layers of meaning'*, discusses in detail, the design of the exhibition and the methodology for the development.

The basis for the use of an exhibition format is explained in an interview with Professor Amanda Lawson, Dean, Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong, when she stated that *"Respondents see an exhibition as an informal learning environment so are able to say they have learnt something they did not know before"* (Muir 2008: pers. comms).

### **1.5.3. Questionnaire design**

The idea of combining quantitative-dominant and qualitative-less dominant design approaches in the single study (Creswell 1994) was the basis for the questionnaire design. The subject matter related directly to the proposition defined in the proposition.

A pragmatic and simplistic approach compared and contrasted the returned questionnaires. This methodology expected to provide some insight into the different audience responses to the subjects portrayed.

The Sydney Quilt and Craft Show in Darling Harbour Sydney, Kudos Gallery at the College of Fine Arts, Paddington and the Palm House Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney were the three locations that exhibited the 12 stitched textile banner exhibitions. At each exhibition, I collected audience feedback in the form of a written, completed and voluntarily submitted questionnaire.

Chapter 5: *'Information Outfall'* includes details on the research methodology and the results of the questionnaire responses.

The University of New South Wales granted ethics clearance in May 2008, under approval 2008/2021, to allow the collection of the completed questionnaires from the three exhibition audiences.

#### **1.5.4. Case study interviews**

As the quantity of literature on the use of textiles as a communication tool was relatively small, I have included case study interviews that would support the findings of the research.

Three practitioners provided information on their practice, which was relevant to the proposition. The University of New South Wales granted ethics clearance in April 2007 (approval 2007/0290) for interviews, with the following three practitioners:

- Linda Gass, a textile designer and artist residing in San Francisco California who produces works to highlight the plight of the San Francisco Bay and water. I held the interview while on vacation in California in 2007.
- Jenny Turpin, a sculptor residing in Sydney who produces large-scale work about water and movement.
- Amanda Lawson, Dean of the Faculty of Creative Arts at the University of Wollongong, who has completed research into audience comprehension for the Australia Council, Commonwealth of Australia's Arts organisation.

The relevant research chapters in Part 1 and the *Reflective conclusion: watermarks!*, in Part 2, include the imparting of knowledge from each case study interview.

#### **1.5.5. Textile banners and exhibition design for assessment**

Informed by the questionnaire analysis, the original water subjects and the research component of this document, *Fathoming the depths: informative textiles*: long cloth textiles and exhibition, show a development in the communicative power of the final body of work. Part 2: Studio Practice and the *Reflective conclusion: watermarks!*, discuss the 'how' and 'why' of this development.

## **1.6. Conclusion**

The finalisation of this Master of Design project has allowed for development in my personal and professional voice and passions. The use of research and a methodological approach has allowed the iterative design process to be more controlled and information driven. The results shown here is of an audience that is aware and interested in the use of textiles as a message medium. That the results of the audience analysis that have been measured and documented, has only added to my scholarship.





## CHAPTER 2

## The common thread

**2.1. Introduction to the literature review**

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, some designers have rediscovered textiles in their endeavour to exhibit a voice in the world, via an everyday life message.

Jo Ann Giordano (Giordano 1994), used textiles in what she termed being the *'feminist tradition'*, in order to document social conscience messages through her textiles in the 1970s.<sup>4</sup>

Despite Giordano's statement, Ingrid Bachmann maintains that textiles are traditionally *"not used for propaganda purposes as they are seen as a cloth of comfort, support for the human body and carry the memories of life, the common thread"* in the late twentieth century (Bachmann 1998).

This section of the research document studies the use of textiles as a message medium. It also provides evidence that the use of this medium is not new, but is now re-emerging as a form of communication in the early twenty-first century. The document examines the use of textiles as a form of information design and looks at its power to communicate and provide knowledge to an audience on certain issues, in particular, in relation to the environment and the politics of history.

The eight selected textiles for the Literature Review contain the following attributes:

- Images that create a message or give information on the communicative power of politics;
- A visual narrative or event, including mapping from which meaning can be derived;
- Symbols, images or motifs that have layers of meaning;
- Illustration, where the materials/cloth and location show meaning or messages;
- Use 'imagetext' that can provide meaning; and
- Include meanings based on the textile's previous use or contextualisation.

Using the theoretical framework of the pictorial turn (Mitchell 1994), the function of the image (Fitzgerald 2002), the meaning of the composition and the modality markers (Kress 1996), as detailed in the Introduction—an analysis of the chosen textiles was

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4 Bachmann and Giordano are only two examples of many who use textiles for social comment.

completed. The same criteria are part of the design development of the stitched textile banners completed for the *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles* exhibitions as discussed in Part 2, Chapter 8.

The following sections discuss the potential to awaken, influence, reaffirm and advance community opinions by using textiles. This use of textiles also examines the information value of the chosen samples, amongst others, and employs all research in the development of my new textile work.

## 2.2. Textile terminology

In developing a theoretical understanding of textiles, and their use, as a reminder of the social and political culture of the time, I will concentrate on Western history and the textiles of Western nations, in particular Australia, the UK and the USA.

Embroidery, tapestry, the banner and the quilt are all historical examples selected for analysis and discussion in this research. The 'quilt' is a pre-cursor to my stitched textile work, which is a development of the 'quilt'<sup>5</sup> structure.<sup>6</sup>

## 2.3. Embroidery

Embroidery is rarely found on existing textiles, which have been protected from light, humidity and human contact or textiles that have survived the ravages of time and the environment. Consequently, there are only a limited number of examples available for study prior to the eleventh century. I have used interpretation of historical textiles, where verification of facts is difficult to obtain

A historical example of a potent political textile is the Bayeux Tapestry, which is the well-known eleventh century embroidery<sup>7</sup>, not a tapestry<sup>8</sup> and purportedly made by Mathilde de Flandre, wife and Queen to the Norman, William the Conqueror, with others of her household and clan.

Recently published research (Wilson 1985; Bridgeford 2004), suggests that the embroidery was actually produced by the Saxons, possibly for Odo of Bayeux, half-brother of William the Conqueror. Andrew Bridgeford in his book *1066: The Hidden History of the Bayeux Tapestry* suggests that the Saxon version of events depicted on the embroidery allowed a different interpretation of the Norman invasion to the English/Saxon population. The embroidery has been described as a "*dangerously many-layered masterpiece*" (Bridgeford 2004: p. 155), which can support conflicting points of view on the subject matter, as well as questioning who actually made the work, when it was made and for whom. It is one of the earliest examples of a "*subversive stitch*" (Parker 1984).

5 Refer to Definition of terms

6 Refer to Part 2: Studio Practice, Chapter 7 for textiles prior to 2006

7 Refer to Definition of terms

8 Refer to Definition of terms



The 'tapestry' is 51cm (20ins) high and 70m (230ft) long and includes 72 individual scenes, each approximately 51cm x 97.3cm (38ins), depicting the Norman invasion of England, including the Battle of Hastings. The size of the work and the area required to display it in its entirety suggests a very powerful message. The final panel of the embroidery is currently not available so the last word on the subject is scholarly interpretation.



**Figure 1:** Detail from the *Bayeux Tapestry* – 11th century. (panel 4) (97cm w x 51cm h)

Translation: "Here Harold sailed the sea" and the text explains that panel four is a depiction in which, "Harold with hawk in hand and tunic tucked up to his waist, embarks accompanied by his men carrying dogs, sweeps and poles. The mast and anchor are raised and the oarsmen start to row whilst another man poles off" (Wilson 1985: p. 174).

Panel four is a subjective image (Fitzgerald 2002), in that it portrays all there is to know about the "embarking of Harold to sail the sea" and models this idea, as it is not a situation that would have been directly observed by Harold's people.

The meaning of the composition (Kress 1996), is supported by the informational value of the elements in relation to each other, that is, the larger scale of the figures to the ships and the use of symbols in the framing of top and bottom to inform the audience.

The intensity and size of the remaining 72 embroideries of the invading Norman power were in all likelihood intimidating to the Saxon audience. The message of the invader's power and their impact on the Saxon community must, however, have been politically unacceptable, in order to enable the support for two or more interpretations from this early textile: a form of double coding (Longbottom 1999).

The Bayeux tapestry only had few contemporaries for comparison, until the use of the banner became widespread in the early nineteenth century. Since the 16th century and possibly as early as the Middle Ages embroidery and women have been inextricably linked through the complex social, political and economic factors of history (Parker 1984), and the banner is a prime example of the use of messages on readily available textiles.

## 2.4. Textile banners

Banners and hangings originated in Rome as battle insignia during the era of military conquests. After Constantine's conversion of Rome to Christianity, banners were out of cloth. These early cloth banners<sup>9</sup> were simple squares carried at right angles to a supporting pole with fringe or tassel added as decoration. During the Crusades, banners came into widespread army use in order to distinguish troops under the common sign of the Cross.

The use of readily available cloth with applied techniques and artisanship was accessible within the community. The use of cloth in this way gave the humble banner a common touch and general acceptance as an information medium dating back as early as the middle Ages.

During the Renaissance, well-known artists such as Botticelli often designed and painted banners for religious and secular celebrations. They provided information in an illustrative format for a community that was unable to read text (Ilhany 1966).

Banners are part of a Church's history and heritage and these include union banners, which depict the trade unions, social history and messages of the time.

For the requirements of organisations such as the women's suffrage movement of 1908 to 1913, the banners were embroidered, stencilled or appliquéd; these banner designs in the early 20th Century were influenced by the arts and craft movement and created within the movement itself. *"Women's traditional needlework skills were employed in a collective and creative endeavour to create the banners, yet the movement's purpose was to undermine this conventional view of women"* (Trustram 2001: p. 2).

*"Banners have become the embodiment of the organisation, a potent symbol of beliefs and hopes for change"* (Young 2005: p.53). Banners are textiles that provide multilayered interpretations of history, sometimes through simple narratives; they are often symbols of protest and reveal great conformity. This interpretation of the banner has greatly informed the development of the stitched textile banners intended for audience assessment as part of this enquiry.

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<sup>9</sup> Refer to Definition of terms



**Figure 2: Banner of the Swan Hill branch of the Australian Natives Association**  
May 1907 (233cm high x 135cm wide)

The Australian Natives Association (ANA) was founded in 1897 as a mutual society and supported such nationalistic issues as afforestation, water conservation, the White Australia Policy and the adoption of wattle as the national floral emblem in 1912, among many other causes in its long history (Robin 2002).

Many of the symbols included in the ANA Swan Hill banner are a means of identifying with Australian nature through a positive value. The use of the kangaroo and emu images facing outwards from the centre of the crest, unlike the current Australian emblem, suggests a wider perspective of ideas and a pride in the uniqueness of Australian fauna. The images of flora are not as specific and look more like the English 'wild rose' or camellia. The map of Australia centred on the image of the globe supports the 'Australian made and produced' philosophy of the ANA, while the crest identifies the produce of mining, grazing, crops and transport. The skin colour of the shaking hands reflects the White Australia Policy of the ANA, where the members would embrace native flora and fauna, but not the original custodians of the land—the Aboriginal people.

The Australian Native Association banner is a subjective image with a central point of view. It was used to solicit pride in the men (women were excluded from the

ANA at this time) involved in the Australian native landscape. The elements in the design are strategically and visually placed in order to attract the audience's attention and are also framed and connected to signify the ideologies of belonging and pride. Swan Hill painter and decorator M. Filmer applied the design to the base cloth for the Association in May 1907.

The banner has developed as a communication tool for the masses; to an extent that was not seen in other forms of textile. As exemplified by the ANA banner, the dimensions are larger than human scale, at 2.3m, and tower over the viewer. Recognisable symbols and images as well as the supporting text and the 'imagetext' work together to provide a visual narrative and the actual information value of the banner.

The range of materials and techniques used to make banners is not restricted and allows the banner to herald the introduction of new ideas and information.

## 2.5. Twentieth century textiles

In the *Modernist Textile Troy* (Troy 2006) documents the use of textiles in America and Europe from 1890 to 1940 and defines a period of political revolution, social reform and radically changing attitudes to art. Textiles were multifaceted, intimately tied to the practices of everyday life and the designers who worked with cloth and created textile designs. However, the men provided the ideas and designs and women provided the labour; evident that there was a clear division along gender lines.

In 1911 the Dadaist Man Ray (Emmanuel Radnitsky) pieced together wool suiting samples into a bedcover for his personal use, and in 1919 the same bedcover was hung on the wall of his studio and entitled 'Tapestry' (Troy 2006: p. 75). With 'Tapestry' Man Ray took the utilitarian quilt and by hanging it on the wall, changed its context, and made it 'art'. As with other artists of the time, Man Ray used needlepoint, embroidery, collage and appliqué to undermine the status quo in the art world; and so developed textiles techniques such as the 'subversive stitch'.<sup>10</sup>

By the late 1930s, the textile industry had three main trends in both constructivist and surface designed textiles. The trends included the promotion of nationalistic and domestic agendas, emergence and elaboration of visual language with the development of Surrealism, and reinvigoration of the pictorial tapestry. Some expressed themselves through mass-produced machine printed textiles while others pursued a handmade composition instead, by using quilting, appliqué, needlepoint and tapestry.

Fannie B. Shaw's Prosperity Quilt, prosperity is just around the corner' (1930-1932) can be seen to have a dual artistic and utilitarian functionality (Troy 2006: p. 149).

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<sup>10</sup> Rozsika Parker coined the phrase as a natural revolution in her book *'The subversive stitch: embroidery and the making of the feminine'* but it is used in this context as 'textiles an alternative to art'.





**Figure 3:** Fannie B. Shaw's '*Prosperity Quilt: prosperity is just around the corner*' 1932 (183cm wide x 218cm high)

The Prosperity quilt is a unique textile that shows the costume of the times and is evocative of the 1930s Depression in the USA. The quilt provides a model of the concept that many people in different occupations are in the same situation, a concept that at times is difficult to visualise, even in the present day. The design uses humour to engage the audience at a time when humour for many was in short supply: and to remind audiences that there is always another perspective.

The information value of the quilt shows the range and depth of people affected by the stock market crash, the fact that the farmers are 'the backbone of the nation' and illustrates Uncle Sam symbolising government subsidies. The elements are designed to attract attention through the repeated format of the red brick wall, the figure looking 'around the corner', the farmer 'backbone' in the centre of the design, and 'legal beer and gold coin' symbols to the right: suggesting the future. Each block has an embroidered label to clarify, add breadth of information and a grid of red sashes.

Shaw combined text and image, flatness, depth, reality and fantasy to communicate her anxiety and tell a story of the time.

Shaw was obviously a sympathiser with Herbert Hoover's politics and messages. Shaw wanted to support his communication with a positive image of a multifaceted community and government in the same predicament. She stated that, *"My inspiration came from Herbert Hoover. Every time you picked up the paper or heard the radio, he would talk about good times around the corner. He would make it sound so good. I wondered if I could make a picture of what he said and what it meant"* (Troy 2006: p. 149).

## 2.6. Political and propaganda textiles

On the other hand, military commemorative or political event textiles in the format of a souvenir, rather than yardage, have been available since at least the eighteenth century. These are goods produced with designs of popular engravings and lithographs for handkerchiefs and bandanas, as Western war effort textiles.

*"Textiles and clothing, although not normally thought of as vehicles for propaganda, can provide excellent public and private canvasses for the expression of patriotic and nationalistic ideas and feelings, serving as visible markers of national unity and support for military and political goals,"* Jacqueline M. Atkins wrote in *Wearing Propaganda* (Atkins 2004: p. 24) about the World War II and Korean War textiles which were produced in the middle of the twentieth century. Atkins refers to these as 'propaganda textiles', also known as 'home front textiles' in the UK and USA and 'wartime textiles' in Japan. Generally, the textiles were mass-produced yardage, visually dynamic, colourful and often bore sophisticated designs, patterns and images relating to all facets of the war and war effort.

Four hundred civilian women interned by the Japanese in Singapore's Changi Prison from March 1942, across six months during World War II, created three surviving Changi quilts, comprised of embroidered squares, each on reused rice and flour bag cloth. Each embroidered square is signed by the interned maker and each was asked to put something of herself into the embroidered square so she could be identified and communicate, even if it was just a name to the men, often a husband's, in nearby prison camps. The majority of the embroidered squares include flowers or floral emblems, such as J. McCubbin's thistle and Kay Francis' garland of flowers as positive reminders of the world prior to their internment. Others used patriotic images such as St George slaying the dragon, the British flag, the V for victory sign and the Drake landing at Plymouth docks. Katherine Heath's embroidery uses humour, showing the 'Changi hairdresser cell' behind the barred window. Many of the squares contain obvious messages, some have concealed meanings, which are no longer known, and others are purely decorative (Rolfe 1998).



**Figure 4: Changi Quilt for Australian Soldiers 1942 (180cm wide x 300cm high)**

The three embroidered quilts, without the traditional wadding, made by the interned women, were gifts for the Red Cross organisations of Australia, Japan and Britain. More importantly, they alleviated boredom, boosted morale and passed on information to other camps communicating the survival of women, rather than to commemorate the war effort. From Rolfe's (Rolfe 1998) writing it is assumed that the quilts were made for the Red Cross, as it played a major role in supplying aid to Singapore and the Prisoners of War in Asia and was an ideal vehicle to pass on valuable information about family and loved ones in other camps.

Australian male internees in Changi Gaol were the intended audience for The Australian Changi quilt. It is a subjective image with a central point of view, made to communicate information and elicit an emotional response from its audience. The embroidered quilt was a very powerful medium used to deliver messages of hope to family and friends during the ravages of War.

Between 1969 and 1971, Irene Miller and a group of women in New York used a similar format to the Changi quilt, in order to raise awareness of the plight of the Hudson River. The *Hudson River Quilt* design has 30 individually designed and made

landmark images of the river: from its source in Lake Tear of the Clouds, to New York harbour. This quilt is the first known US 'quilt for a cause' as it highlights the conservation and preservation issues associated with the river and was for 18 years, exhibited across the United States, England and the Netherlands.

Also in the USA in the 1970s, the feminist and political art of the times shaped Jo-Ann Giordano's textile practice. In 1994, she wrote, in her article in the *Surface Design Journal*, that environmental issues had been an important concern in her textiles for the past five years.

*She wrote, "The feminist movement played a major role in advancing textiles as a medium for political expression. In American and British feminist movements of the 19th and early 20th Century, textiles were used to display political beliefs and to promote group solidarity. Women used needlework rather than painting or graphics as a means of expression because it was the medium they knew best and because the doors to other art pursuits were closed to them. Quilts, banners and other useful domestic textiles were embroidered with suffragist, abolitionist and temperance sentiments."* (Giordano 1994: p. 10)

Giordano stated that if her textiles could help to educate and stimulate debate about environmental issues, she would have succeeded in her intent.

Giordano is only one example of a number of artists who grew up in the 1970s and used the textile medium to deliver their message. My textiles, amongst others, discussed in the following chapter, illustrate the impact of this period of free expression on the textiles of the early twenty-first century.

In a more contemporary scenario, the proliferation of patriotic images and sentiments on sweaters, t-shirts, underwear and carry bags since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, presents a powerful message of American solidarity (Atkins, 2004).

## 2.7. Conclusion

In summary, this chapter provides a succinct understanding of the historical use and communicative power of textiles ability to inform an audience about the politics of an often well-known event, situation or environment. The next chapter considers the development of the textile medium in the twenty-first century as a medium that has metamorphosed from banner to a voice of concern, when politics of situations are often beyond the control of the audience.



## CHAPTER 3

## Message in the medium

**3.1. Introduction to contemporary textiles**

The early twenty-first century has seen a proliferation of textiles and exhibitions expressing environmental and political messages. *Undercover: political expression in traditional quilts* was the first of two exhibitions exploring political themes in textiles, presented by San Jose Museum of Quilts and Textiles in the autumn of 2003.

The works, mostly taken from the Museum's collection, illustrated the ways women used quilting to give voice to political or social expression prior to World War II.

The second exhibition, *Special interests: the art of politics* was an invitational exhibition of overt political and social commentary using contemporary textiles displayed intentionally in 2004, during the presidential election campaign (Museum 2004).

**3.2. Early twenty-first century textiles**

One *Art of Politics* exhibitor, Linda MacDonald, used serious issues in the community to engage the viewer in contemporary political dialogue, particularly about the environment. A typical example 'Migration of the California Red-legged Frog' was used by MacDonald to publicise the destruction of the natural environment by building contractors and consultants in California, USA, in 2002 (MacDonald 2006)

*Political textiles*, a group exhibition and workshop at the Three Walls venue in Chicago, during October 2004 included 'Repent', which was a prayer memorial banner co-ordinated by Sherri Woods. The banner included images of hundreds of tiny coffins collected from members of various faiths, social justice communities and church sites of protest. The banner represented the number of US soldiers killed in Iraq, with white running stitches between the coffins to represent the thousands of nameless dead Iraqi civilians. The US/Iraq war death list in the early twenty-first century is a harrowing ordeal for any mother, sister, father, brother, uncle, aunt or cousin of the thousands of families affected by the terrorist wars.

One of the most dynamic textile statements between settler and indigenous culture is the 'Resistance' flag by r e a, which uses the long cloth format to express ownership of the land.

r e a, (Regina Morris), is a Gamilaroi/Gamilaraay artist, originally from Coonabarabran in NSW and her work often contains socio-political commentary (Miller 2002).



**Figure 5: 'Resistance (flag)' 1996 by r e a (200cm wide x 600cm high)**

The Resistance flag is a subjective image with a central point of view used to communicate information. The flag was made to elicit an emotional response and motivate a behavioural response from the audience, by using the reworked Aboriginal flag overlaid with the word 'resistance'. The flag acts as a metaphor for the survival of Indigenous people since British settlement in 1788. Renowned Luritja artist, Harold Thomas, designed the Aboriginal flag in 1971 and its colours are now identifiable nationally and internationally.

Colour semiotics include the use of black to symbolise Aboriginal people, yellow representative of the sun, the constant sustainer of life, and the red depicts the earth, also used as ochre applied to the body in Aboriginal ceremonies. The overall warm scale of colours is energetic, salient and foregrounding.

### 3.3. Textiles and the environment

Human made decorated cloth has expressed opinions about the environment and ownership of the landscape for a millennium. The essay 'Australian indigenous textiles: facilitating radical exchange' by Doreen Mellor, explains that she believes *"textiles, perhaps belying their longstanding and collective mediating role, are often found in the most assertive and transformative paradigms"* (Koumis 1999: p. 21). In her book *Saltwater people: the waves of memory*, Nonie Sharp describes her comprehension that Australian Aboriginal people have a different understanding of their role as 'custodians of the natural environment,' which is opposed to the Western approach of 'open access' for all and 'harvesting' the contents for food and profit (Sharp 2002: p. 9).

Australian Aboriginal artists Dorothy Napangardi and Judy Watson express their relationship to their country through their artwork both on canvas and in textile. I find the images very beautiful, thoughtful and intelligent. Both artists have influenced my textile designs since the 1990s. The mapping of place in Dorothy Napangardi's work 'Salt on Mina Mina' 2001 has numerous levels of meaning, including the sacred (Napangardi 2002).

The words of Judy Watson in her book *"Judy Watson blood language"* resonate with me (Watson 2009: p. 20). *"For Judy Watson and her Aboriginal ancestors, water has a resonance as a sacred resource, used to embody life and to feed belonging and identity: an organism, a living thing requiring nurture and acknowledgement."* These words express my opinions, feelings, passion for, and about water and profoundly affect the textile works that I strive to produce.

On the other side of the world and in another paradigm, Linda Gass (Keeney 2007), among many textile artists in the USA raising issues about the environment, uses aerial photographs and historical documents to develop the designs for her hand painted silk and machine stitched textiles. Gass, a passionate activist, uses her textile works to create awareness for the need of sustainable water resource management in the American west, especially in the San Francisco Bay area.

In our case-study interview, Linda Gass explained that *"The environmental activist message behind my art is very important to me"* (Muir 2007: pers.comms). Gass went on to say that, she feels like the message behind her work illustrating water issues in the American West, chose her to depict these issues, rather than the other way around. Gass grew up in Los Angeles, in Southern California and could not comprehend why the environment looked so green when it did not rain.

Photographs, aerial views, maps, illustrative historical maps, topographic and highway maps, inform Gass' work. She likes to visit the places in her artwork, to experience them with all her senses (sight, smell, sound, taste of air and touch). *"She doesn't do much walking in the water: either I am not allowed in it, or it is polluted or I don't want to pollute it further. I do a lot of reading about water history: in books, online and in magazines."* (Muir 2007: pers.comms)

When asked why Gass uses maps her response was *“My mathematical brain likes the precision and visually concise information. Information is power. I am interested in little lines and changes in lines, the essence in something and the compactness of expression”* (Muir 2007: pers.comms).



**Figure 6: ‘Puzzle of Salt’ by Linda Gass (75cm wide x 73cm high)**

Linda Gass has decided as her focus, to concentrate on making aerial landscape views on hand-dyed silk quilts of San Francisco Bay. She has explained that she is interested in the relationship between the body of water that is San Francisco Bay and the human development around it. She believes we need to live in balance with the health of the water and the health of the people living around the water, and to preserve the delicate balance of innocent flora/fauna in the equation.

The interview with Linda Gass was important to this research as it confirmed to me that others see the role of textiles, the environment and communication as an inclusive and important medium to deliver the message.

The level of research into the subject matter that Gass portrays to her audience through her painted and stitched textiles, has confirmed for me the impact of quality research and scientific rigour can have on the finished product. The value of the information when independently verified should not be underestimated.

### **3.4. Textiles as communication**

In their Introduction to *Cloth and Human Experience* Annette B. Weiner and Jane Schneider write:

*“The power of textiles to communicate and convey content beyond the aesthetic has been observed in cultures across both time and space. Many scholars have noted the role cloth can play as a form of communication for the ‘broad possibilities of construction, colour, and patterning give cloth an almost limitless potential for communication’” (Schneider 1989: p. 2) .*

An outstanding example of this is Australian Beth Hatton’s series of weavings entitled ‘Selection #1 – sheep’ (2001). Hatton uses kangaroo skin off-cuts and wool materials woven with stencil lettering in order to raise issues about the difficulties of both introduced species and native species cohabiting harmoniously in Australia (Koumis 2007).



**Figure 7: ‘Selection #1 – sheep’ (Second Series) by Beth Hatton 2001**  
(90cm wide x 144cm high)

The ‘imagetext’ is very clear in the work, with the white wool lettering reading from right to left and in reverse, recording the names of the endangered native species. The dark lettering of the same size records the introduced sheep and is in the background, as if subservient to the native species.

The tapestry ‘Selection #1 – sheep’ is a subjective image made to elicit an emotional response and illustrate an idea, which cannot be easily visualised by an audience. By using the names of extinct native species woven over the names of introduced species, the tapestry acts as a metaphor for the struggle to coexist in the Australian landscape. Colour semiotics includes the use of black to symbolise the menace of the introduced species and red depicts the earth, also used as red ochre applied to the body in Aboriginal ceremonies.



Elsje van Keppel is an Australian textile artist I have referred to in the design diary for one of the stitched textile banners. Keppel's textile work or *'Fragile objects'* (O'Brien 1997) use the Australian landscape to resolve her sense of identity between her European origins and her life in Australia, *"The objects I make are vessels for the presence of the human being, aware and surrendering to the realities of nature"*.

*'Spinifex stitching'* presents the characteristics of the material itself with the gentle soft sensory engagement of touch, feel, scent and sound throughout the many layers of meaning.

Another case study interview is with Jenny Turpin, a sculptor, who transforms movement and water into sculptures of constant change, whether from wind or tide. Turpin discusses the need to make work that is public space artwork for the 'big world' so that the environment and water can be the central subject of the information. I felt that Turpin's advice was timely and that her statements verified the voice I was projecting about water.



**Figure 8: 'Katrina Blues' 2005 by Susan Shie (190cm w x 115cm h) © Susan Shie**

The 'big world' for US textile artist Susan Shie has been creating quilts with 'imagetext' in order to communicate with her audience. This is especially evident in the case of Hurricane Katrina; Shie's voice has an intensity of volume.

The painted quilt 'Katrina Blues' is 45" high x 75" wide and made from blank white fabric which is overdrawn and hand-painted. Shie is interested in politics and ecology and presents issues of everyday life in her textile work.

'Katrina Blues' was originally made to document Shie's relationship with her daughter and granddaughter, but Hurricane Katrina struck and she felt compelled to document the disaster.

The quilt's intention was to elicit an emotional response from the audience about the devastation of Hurricane Katrina on the city of New Orleans in August 2005, through diary notes penned on the textile. The design is a model of the world affected by Katrina and includes a diagrammatical representation of the impact on the people, the community and the environment. The elements of the textile arrangement show a large Mother Nature with small microcosms struggling to survive, asking questions about why the devastation occurred. The framed images are within the edges of the background textile and the closed structure, despite a couple of messages breaking out into the framed stitched edge. Hand-written text dominates the design, signifying the solution is not complete despite much written information. The dark colour of the text and outline drawings adds to the sense of menace.

### **3.5. Conclusion**

The analysis of information value in the sample textiles reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3 has shown that despite nearly one thousand years, the textile's ability to communicate information to an audience has changed very little. The use of visual language, sensory engagement supplemented with text has the ability to provide many layers of information: from 1066 when very few people could read, to the twentieth century, when the image speaks louder than words.

## CHAPTER 4

## Layers of meaning

**4.1. Introduction to development of audience enquiry**

To validate the audience's response to the stitched textile banners for the *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles* curated exhibitions, the design work for both the banners and the exhibition must be produced and assessed under the auspices of a theoretical framework.

Stitched textiles were used by visual artists in the Modernist period of 1860 to 1940 as an alternative medium to develop ideas and access messages (Troy 2006).

Postmodernist designers railed against the Modernist presentation of the 'truth' in '*form follows function*', the supremacy of reason and the perfectibility of humankind for a better society. Constructive postmodernists claim to offer a unity of scientific, ethical, aesthetic and religious intuitions (Witcombe 1997).

The Pictorial Turn (Mitchell 1994) of the late twentieth century is based on the 'imagetext', a combination of illusion and realism in a world where the image is the medium of the message.

Chapter 4 discusses the theoretical framework underpinning the production of the 12 stitched textile banners that form the *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles* exhibition. It also examines the impact of visual theory and current audience research to place the information value of the textile banners in context. The use of textile for fashion or object is not part of the scope of this research.

**4.2. Theoretical framework**

The theoretical frameworks of postmodernism, picture theory, visual theory, semiology and visual language form part of the discussion on layers of meaning all of which have had an influence on the design and information value for the textile banners in this project.

**4.2.1. Postmodernism**

The definition of postmodern is a difficult one but simply put, postmodernism has gone beyond the world-view of modernism and come into being, shortly after the conclusion of World War II, around 1950.



Postmodern theory shifted the focus of analysis away from intellectual ideas and into the language in which thinking was expressed (Appignanesi 1999: p. 57). *"The new language was viewed as a function of a system; a structure and synchronicity of 'existing now' rather than the previously diachronic, which is 'existing and changing over time'".*

Hart recognises that the postmodern pays attention to surface rather than depth, uses of the everyday rather than a commitment to high seriousness, discontinuities rather than unities and possesses a thoroughly decentred subjectivity (Hart 2004). Both Charles Jencks in his book *'What is post-modernism?'* and Umberto Eco in *'Postscript to the name of the rose,'* identify the use of double coding where modern techniques are used with old patterns in order to produce irony and another meaning (Longbottom 1999).

Meanings, signs, signification, paradigms, metaphor, metonymy and semiotics all form part of the postmodern language. Other characteristics of the language include totemism, deconstruction, power and legitimisation, and true knowledge through science and politics combined.<sup>11</sup> The design of the textile banners for the exhibition *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles* integrate these characteristics.

#### 4.2.2. Picture theory

*"'We're a short-attention-span-society' said Sergeant Marge"* to Rusty the journalist (Kellerman 2007: p. 265). Fictional writing, exemplified by Faye Kellerman's 2007 novel, *The Burnt House* has characters that talk about the changes to society, the love of captioned pictures and instantaneous communication.

The Internet, the computer and instantaneous communication began the era of the picture. The design and arts fields have adopted linguistic text into the mainstream. In his book *Picture Theory*, W.J.T. Mitchell (Mitchell 1994: p. 16), has defined the pictorial turn as a *"post-linguistic, post-semiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visibility, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies and figurality"*. The audiences' visual experience and visual literacy translates decoding and interpretation of text and images. *"The use of semiotics as opposed to iconology is differentiated as the latter is likely to be linked to instinct, the unconscious or the body as a non-linguistic domain"*, explains Mitchell.

'Imagetext' designates composite, conceptual works that combine image and text, and look at the relations of the visual to the verbal. Mitchell further defines 'imagetext' as illusionism and realism. *"Illusionism is the capacity of the pictures to deceive, delight, astonish and amaze or take power over the audience, as in Trompe-l'œil's ability to trigger a responsive experience under the guise of 'this is how things look.'"* Realism on the other hand, is associated with the capacity of the picture to show the facts about things: the authorised, socially credible real perspective of *'this is the way things are.'* (Mitchell 1994: p. 89)

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<sup>11</sup> Refer to Definition of terms

In the twenty-first century, we live in a world of surveillance and spectacle and the pictorial turn.

### 4.2.3. Visual theory

Gillian Rose in her publication *Visual Methodologies* (Rose 2001), defines visual culture as a new field of study and focuses on the importance of images in contemporary society. Rose defines five aspects of visual culture, which are valuable when assessing the social affects of images:

1. the image itself must promote a reaction from the audience that could be resistant, subversive or pleasurable
2. the image visualises social difference from the anticipated view
3. the image is looked at in the 'ways of seeing' (Berger 1972), and not simply the image itself
4. the emphasis on embedded meaning in the image, in addition to semiotics, in the wider culture of the audience
5. the culture the audience brings to the viewing of the image

According to Rose, the three sites where an image forms,, include the site of production, the image itself and the site of the audience viewing the image. Further to this, for each of the three sites, there are also three modalities that contribute to the understanding of the image and these include: technology, composition and the society of the viewer.

The making of the stitched textile banners for this project embodies the three sites of image production identified by Rose. These findings are included in the responses from the audience viewing the exhibitions and completing the questionnaires.

### 4.2.4. Semiology

Semiology is the study of signs. It is an elaborate vocabulary of symbols, each one stands for itself and for something other than itself; which this is interpreted in accordance with the viewer's culture and society.

Umberto Eco in the Postscript to *the name of the rose* (Eco 1984), explains 'construction' by the reader, that "*a dialogue is established between the text and its readers (the author is excluded).....writing means constructing through the text, one's own model reader*". In the same way, a design is the preserve of both the viewer and the designer, who construct a model audience to develop the work.

Simply put, semiology is centrally concerned with the social effects of meaning of a sign. A sign is the basic unit of visual language and consists of two parts: the signified and the signifier. For example, the symbol for recycled water, the signifier, is three teardrop shapes forming an intertwined circle. Recycled water is the signified. The actual water is the referent.



**Figure 9:** 'Recycled water' symbol

The three kinds of signs are icon, index and symbol.

- The icon is when a signified and a signifier have a likeness to each other, such as a bridge over a river, which stands for all bridges. Diagrams are iconic signs as they show the relation between the parts.
- An index sign is when the signified and the signifier have an inherent cultural link such as the index sign for 'non-potable water,' that is a tap with a circle around it and a line diagonally across the circle. Culturally, we understand not to access something that is located within a circle that has a line across the image. It is seen as a 'no go' sign.
- A symbol is a conventionalised sign with a clear arbitrary relation between signifier and signified. For example, the symbol for a female toilet is a figure wearing a dress.

Summing up the relevance of signs to the design of the stitched textile banners, signs are motivated signifiers (forms) and signifieds (meanings) and as designers, we use the signifiers we consider appropriate for expression of signifieds. For example, the banner for 'We will drink it!' as employed by Rodin's 'thinker', suggests to the audience that we all need to think about drinking recycled sewage.

#### **4.2.5. Visual language**

Alternatively, information designs are signage or *wayfinding* systems used in a metaphorical sense to provide information to an audience. These designs do not just give clear information as quickly as possible, but instead 'show people the way', through active directioning which is imposed on the viewer.

In Kim Baer's *Information Design Workbook*, her definition of information design is "*the translating of complex, unorganised or unstructured data into valuable, meaningful information. Effective communication is the very essence of information design*". Designer Fernando Baptista explains, "*Research has shown that audience comprehension is enhanced when designers combine both image and text based cues*". (Baer 2008: p. 13)

Andreas Uebele points out in *Signage systems and information graphics* (Uebele 2006), that when we are standing upright looking straight ahead our heads are slightly

forward and our eyes therefore drop, so information placed at eye level can be missed. Other issues of detail include arrows, font size, type, qualities and position, but the overall concept must consider colour, letterform, shape, proportion, tone and imagery. Most audiences respond to images more readily because they find them easier to understand than abstract numbers. The visual language portrays qualities such as freshness, modernity, care, responsiveness, dependability, intelligence and the audience subconsciously reads these messages. This unwritten visual language can often override explicit messages in text and images.

As discussed in the Introduction the functions of images have three capacities, according to Mary Ann Fitzgerald in her paper on *The Typology of Image Function* (Fitzgerald 2002). These are there to elicit emotion or try to encourage an emotional reaction, motivate and encourage a behavioural response and model an idea, as it provides a description to help visualise something that is not apparently observable.

The use of visual language and information design theories is a reasonably new concept in communication. Peter Bonnici in his 1999 book, *Visual language: the hidden medium of communication* states that “all communication takes place through language, but not all languages use words” (Bonnici 1999).

Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen in *Reading Images: the grammar of visual design* (Kress 1996), look at the different types of images which exist in western society, the meaning of composition, how modality markers work and the semiotics of colour.

The meaning of the composition relates to the representational and interactive meanings of the image through three interrelated systems: information value, salience and framing.

Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen identify modality markers as components of value to visual language. These include colour, contextualisation, representation, depth, illumination, brightness, text and colour semiotics.

Textiles have a range of tactile and sensory qualities that textile designers have exploited as part of the design methodology since humans first wore cloth. The tactile aspects of cloth include the bi-polar attributes of surface texture, density, temperature, structure and weight. The sensory attributes include touch, feel, aroma, sight and sound.

The type of image, the function of the image, the meaning of the composition and modality markers, including tactility and sensory engagement, have been used as a standard format to analyse the historical and contemporary textiles as part of the literature review and design the textile banners for the *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles* exhibition.

### 4.3. The audience

Janis Jefferies is cited in Sonia Andrew's article 'Textile Semantics: considering a communication-based reading of Textiles' (Andrew 2008), in relation to the perception that textiles are used as 'text', not in a typographic sense but as carriers of information through the purpose of the image. Jefferies wrote, "*The viewer is a participant in the communication process through textiles, creating their own meanings from textile work, in addition to those intended by the producer.*"

On the other hand Olsen (Andrew 2008), suggests there are three factors that influence audience responses, these being: the characteristics of the object, the environment in which the response occurs and the characteristics of the viewer themselves.

The audiences' assessment of the *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles* banners and exhibitions are the final point of meaning and the affect of the images. Therefore, it was necessary to consider the understanding of audience and exhibition and the impact on the final analysis early in the design, development and production process.

Conversely, the technology of the site of the exhibition affects the audience's reaction to the work. In addition, the audience of an image affects the meaning and effect of the textile. Whether seen in a large exhibition space with other textiles, an educational-facility exhibition or an art gallery, the audience will be different, as will the reaction to the subject matter on display.

The social context is the most important modality for understanding the audience of the textiles. The different ways of relating to visual images in different contexts and the ability of the textiles at various sites has a major affect on the comprehension of the audience. Therefore, the two aspects of social modality are the social practices of viewing and the social identities of the viewers. The title of the textile image also affects the viewer's interpretation differently in each type of location.

For the exhibition layout, the spatial organisation of the exhibition design should take into consideration the shapes and lines and their arrangement in relation to each other, overall as well as their relationship to the ground.

The use of perspective and vanishing points should explore the different angles between the viewer and the textile banner as this will affect the difference in height between the two. A specific relation between the viewer and the image is important if the textile is to capture audience attention.

The light emanating from the textile image and the light illuminating the textile will also both affect the saturation and value of the colours. The use of light and geometrical perspective can enhance the composition and highlight areas of interest.

The overall expressive content of a textile image is "*the combined effect of subject matter and visual form*" (Rose 2001: p. 46), and appeals to the viewer for its completeness and ability to support the socialness discussed previously.

In an interview with Professor Amanda Lawson (Muir 2008: pers. comms), the research Lawson had completed on audience understanding had three outcomes that were crucial in her research; *“public accountability, to evaluate the effectiveness of the message and evaluate the aesthetic response to the designer’s voice.”* In addition Lawson recommended that *“the artist’s voice should be the language for the text panels (exhibition item labels), simple and not too didactic and that the scientist’s voice would enhance things.”*

I have intentionally adjusted this advice to focus on the stitched textile banners rather than text panels on the exhibition item labels.

#### **4.4. Conclusion**

The theoretical framework used for the development of the stitched textiles for this enquiry has primarily used ‘Picture Theory’ in a simplistic way, information design, visual language supplemented by postmodern thinking and the textiles’ inherent qualities. The success of the designs to impart their information message is in the analysis of the respondents’ questionnaires provided in Part 5: *Information outfall*.

## CHAPTER 5

## Information outfall

**5.1. Introduction to analysis of questionnaire responses**

The decision to question the audience of a specifically designed and produced textile exhibition and the subjects chosen for the questionnaire relate directly to the proposition:

*“An understanding of information design and audience comprehension in an exhibition setting, can inform the textile’s ability to communicate an environmental message, particularly about water.”*

The design of the questionnaire was based on the idea of combining a quantitative dominant and qualitative less-dominant approach in the single study (Creswell 1994).

The audience’s comprehension of the communication value of ‘water’ information as presented on the exhibited stitched textile banners is the subject explored in this research.

The purpose of the feedback was to assess the use of textiles as a viable medium for the communication of political and environmental messages in the twenty-first century.

The theoretical perspective used is social learning theory (Bower and Hilgard 1981), where human behaviour is explained in terms of a continuous interaction between cognitive, behavioural and environmental determinants (Creswell 1994). Social learning theory applied to this project is explained, where the audience’s cognition is found in the object of the questions and their behaviour in the exhibition setting. The potential for the respondent’s behaviour to occur within an educational function is explained by Amanda Lawson’s theory of exhibitions acting as learning environments (Muir 2008: pers. comms). This theory postulates that the environment is the subject of the questions and refers to the location and climate of the exhibition spaces.

The ‘Definition of terms’ referred to in this chapter are provided at the start of this research document.

The delimitations of the questionnaire responses are confined to those respondents who attended one or more of the *Fresh and salt messages in stitched textiles* exhibitions. The intended audience were Sydney Basin residents and their visitors who attended the exhibitions and who voluntarily completed and returned the questionnaire.

Exclusions to the scope of the subject questioned include a water subject not documented in the published press or available by electronic means in the stated period used to define the *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles* exhibition banners. This includes the subject of climate change although it influences some of the iconography, the specifics of party politics and the opinions of the audience who did not return a completed questionnaire.

The attendant audience response decreases the generalisation of the findings, so that the findings cannot be generalised to all areas of textile exhibitions, this therefore is a limitation of the study.

The significance of this study has provided an interpretation of how people interact with textiles, through 'messages', and extended existing research by contextualising textiles as a communication medium.

The literature pertaining to quantitative and qualitative analysis is vast and has been confined for this research to John W. Creswell's *Research Design: qualitative and quantitative approaches*, *The research process* by Gary D. Bouma and Peter M. Nardi's *Doing survey research: a guide to quantitative methods*, which were both invaluable in compiling the questionnaire in a simple language.

Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman's '*Qualitative data analysis*' and Judith Riley's '*Getting the most from your data*,' were used to complete the simple analysis of audience responses. The simplistic manner of the analysis is a way of clarifying the significant in the research and not seen as a disregard for the complexity of audience comprehension or research.

The methodology for the research included the design of the questionnaire. The questionnaire's intention was to sample a group of people for attitude and behaviour in a cross-sectional analysis between two or more locations. I designed the questions and based them on the subjects in the proposition for which the research was seeking quantitative answers. Having detailed these, I created qualitative questions, which were to allow the respondents to discuss certain controlled questions, should they have the time and the inclination.

An assistant or I approached all respondents in attendance at each exhibition, provided them with a pen and the six-page document, which included the one page questionnaire as the last page. The six-page document detailed the research proposal and significance, University ethics approval and requested the respondent to sign their agreement in order to be part of the research. Evocation with a time limit was also included as required by the University of NSW.

Respondents were able to decline to complete the questionnaire or not return the completed document, so the analysis was completed via a convenience sample (Creswell 1994).



A register has the completed and returned questionnaires with identification number specific to the location, signature/name of the respondent and date recorded. The names were converted to a data number when loaded into an excel spreadsheet for analysis. The School of Design Studies office, College of Fine Arts now has all of the respondent's original questionnaires. The University's ethics approval required the document's destruction after seven years.

The first exhibition held at the Sydney Quilt and Craft Show, Sydney Darling Harbour Exhibition Centre, across five days in early June 2008; produced 309 completed questionnaires from the audience.

The location of the second exhibition was the Kudos Gallery, adjacent to the College of Fine Arts, at the Paddington campus of the University of New South Wales. The exhibition was open from 27 October to 1 November 2008 and 63 completed questionnaires resulted.

The third exhibition, at the Palm House, Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney from 27 February to 9 March 2009; provided 168 completed questionnaires.

Five hundred and forty, completed questionnaires were available for assessment. Then, a necessary culling of questionnaires on the basis that respondents who were friend/family or knew my work, respondents who did not complete two of the important questions and respondents who did not provide any explanation, only used yes and no answers, was done.

As a result, the Sydney Quilt and Craft Show responses reduced to 235, the Kudos Gallery to 48 and the Palm House to 137, making 420 responses for assessment.

The variables in the study refer to the audience and the location.

The three exhibition venues enabled analysis of any differences in results between audiences. This included the following findings:

- highly literate in and generally committed to textiles at Sydney Quilt and Craft Show ([www.quiltersguildnsw.com.au](http://www.quiltersguildnsw.com.au));
- an intellectual, knowledgeable and research orientated-audience within a textiles program at College of Fine Arts ([www.arc.unsw.edu.au/cofa/kudos](http://www.arc.unsw.edu.au/cofa/kudos)); and
- attendees with a heightened sense of the environment, a love of gardens and the Sydney Harbour landscape in the Royal Botanic Gardens. ([www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au)).

Question 6: "Would you have expected to learn about the environment from a textile exhibition?" was expected to show a higher percentage of positive responses.

The questionnaire used was the same standard set of questions used at each of the three exhibition locations. The questions were:

1. Which of the 12 stitched textiles would you like to discuss? It can be more than one.
2. What subject does the stitched textile present to you? Is the message congruent or coherent?
3. Did you have an understanding of the subject prior to seeing the textile work today?
4. What new knowledge did you learn from viewing the stitched textile today?
5. Does this change your attitude or belief in the subject?
6. Will the new knowledge affect your attitude to water in future?
7. Would you have expected to learn about the environment from a textiles exhibition?
8. If so, when and where has this happened before?
9. If not, will you look for textiles to be a message medium in future?
10. Do you have anything else you would like to add to the discussion?

The term 'triangulation' referred to the comparison between the three different exhibitions, compared and contrasted in a pragmatic approach.

The data analysis for the quantitative responses I completed manually and the Leximancer program by Marion Burford assisted with the analysis of qualitative responses. Leximancer images are included in the document that follows.

The result of the questionnaire responses that follow are a consolidation of three separate pragmatic assessments.

## 5.2. Quantitative questionnaire responses

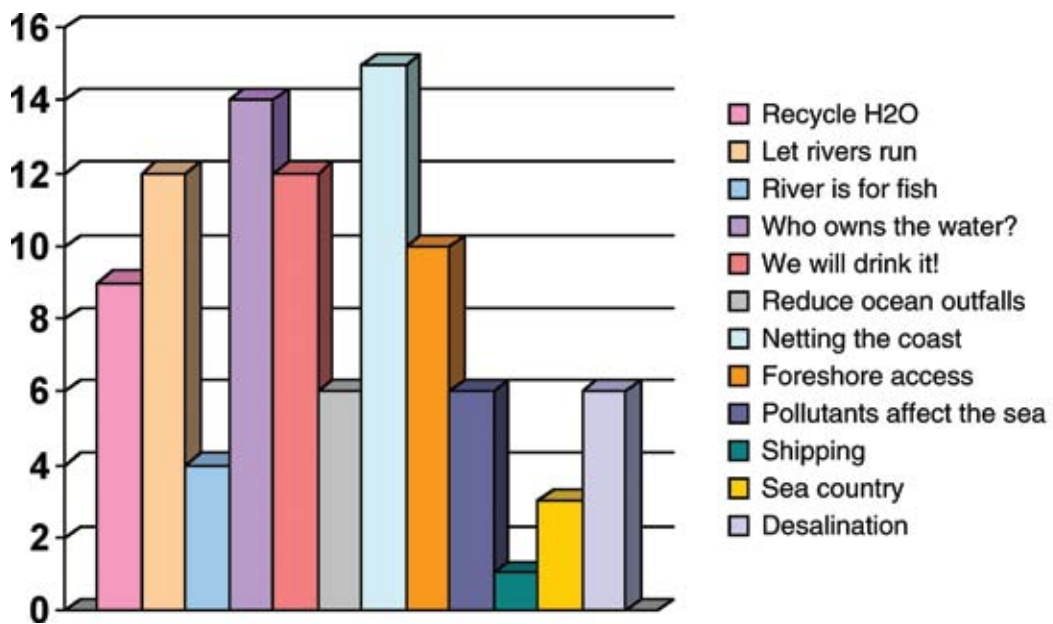
A pragmatic (Creswell 1994), approach to the assessment of the respondent's answers has been used to document support for the original proposition that 'An exhibition of designed textiles, using an understanding of information design and audience comprehension, is a viable medium for the communication of an environmental message, particularly about water.'

When asked in Question 1 'which of the twelve stitched textiles <sup>12</sup> would you like to discuss in your written response?' The answers in descending order were:

- |                        |                              |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Netting the coast   | 7. Pollutants affect the sea |
| 2. Who owns the water? | 8. Reduce ocean outfalls     |
| 3. Let rivers run      | 9. Desalination              |
| 4. We will drink it!   | 10. River is for fish        |
| 5. Foreshore access    | 11. Sea country              |
| 6. Recycle H2O         | 12. Shipping                 |

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<sup>12</sup> For a list of the design subjects presented on each banner refer to Part 2: Studio Practice Chapter 8 *'Fresh and salt'*



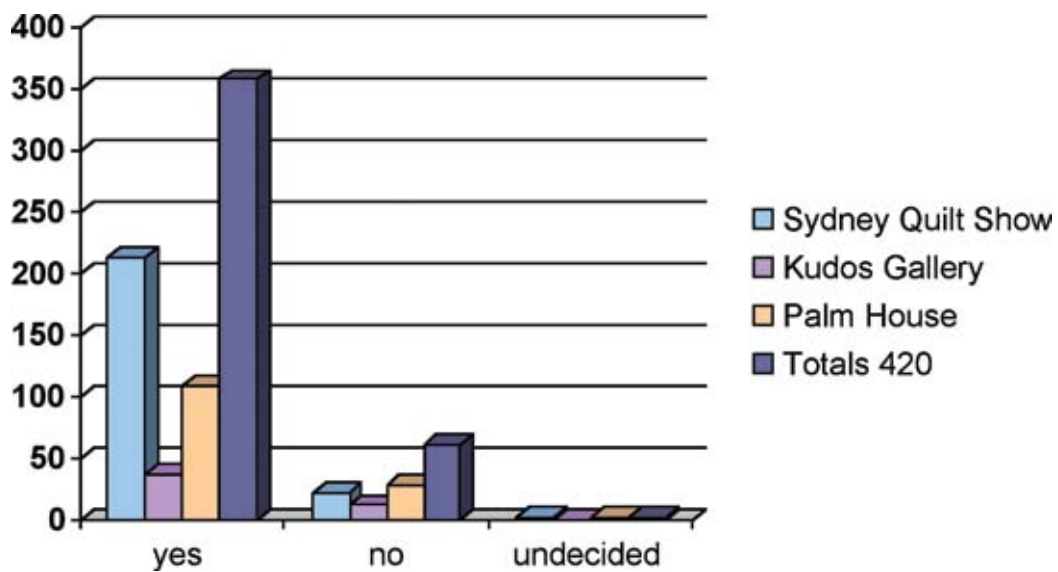
**Chart 1:** Which stitched textile would respondents like to discuss?

Fifteen per cent of respondents wanted to discuss 'Netting the coast' followed closely by 'Who owns the water' at 14 per cent. The next score was 'Let rivers run' and 'We will drink it!' with 12 per cent of responses each. These four designs appear to be the most successful information design, chosen by 53 per cent of respondents.

The least effective designs at delivering the message appeared to be 'Shipping', then 'Sea country' and 'River is for fish' in that order, as noted above. Refer to Chart 1 above for a graphic representation of the results of the analysis

Question 2: 'What subject does the stitched textile present to you?' and 'Is the message congruent or coherent?' are both reported in the qualitative chapter that follows.

Question 3 asked if the respondent had 'an understanding of the subject prior to seeing the textile work in the exhibition?' Eighty-five per cent of respondents noted that they had a prior understanding of the water issue they wanted to discuss in their questionnaire, while 14 per cent of responses did not have an understanding of the subject. Refer to Chart 2 for a graphic representation of the results of the analysis.



**Chart 2:** *Did you have an understanding of the subject prior to seeing the textile work?*

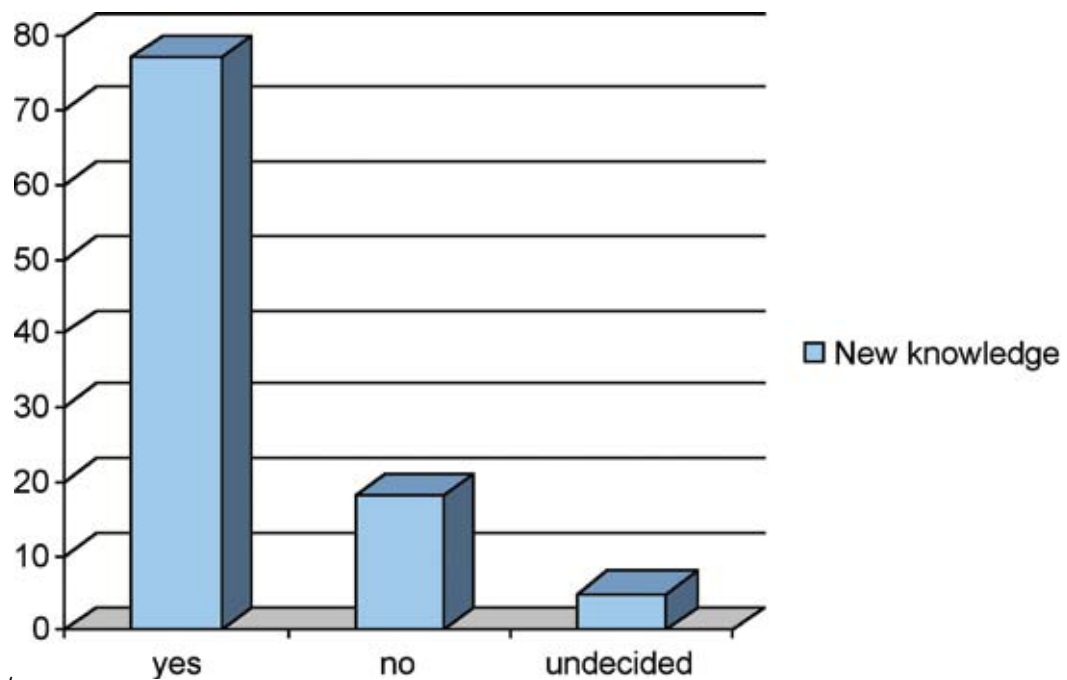
'Netting the Coast' was the most popular subject with the greatest prior knowledge in two of the three exhibitions.

Responses from the first exhibition at Sydney Quilt and Craft Show were highest for 'We will drink it!' and 'Who owns the water?,' while 'Netting the Coast' scored fifth place behind 'Foreshore access' and 'Recycle H2O'.

The Kudos Gallery exhibition responses showed that 'Let the rivers run' and 'Netting the coast' were equal in the highest understanding of the issue.

Across all three exhibitions, 'Shipping' rated only six responses from attendees. The design must not be clear enough for the respondents or it is an issue respondents cannot see and therefore they do not find interesting enough to understand.

The qualitative analysis includes the responses to Question 4: 'What new knowledge did you learn from viewing the stitched textile?' and provides additional understanding of the results of Question 3 above.



**Chart 3:** *Did you learn new knowledge from viewing the stitched textiles?*

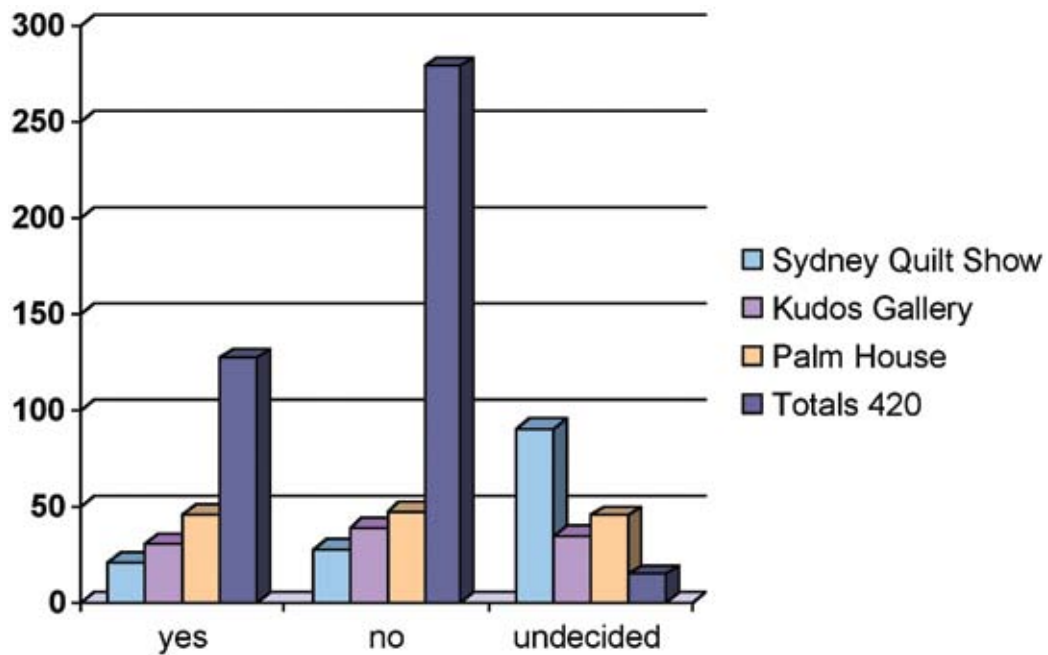
When respondents identified new knowledge on their questionnaire, an analysis of the quantities of responses showed that a combined 77 per cent of respondents learnt new knowledge, 18 per cent did not and 5 per cent did not answer. Refer to Chart 3, above for a visual representation of this data.

The qualitative responses to this question are in section '5.3: Qualitative questionnaire responses'.

Professor Amanda Lawson, Dean, Faculty of Creative Arts at University of Wollongong, explained in an interview that, *"Respondents see an exhibition as an informal learning environment so are able to say they have learnt something they did not know before"* (Muir 2008: pers. comms).

Lawson was part of the 1998 Miles Ahead team, who with an Australia Council grant, collected data and developed the publication of the same name, in order to discover what makes arts-marketing and audience development successful in regional Australia.

Lawson's research explained that the phenomenon of respondents seeing an exhibition as an informal learning environment occurred, despite the fact that the audience had prior knowledge of the subject.

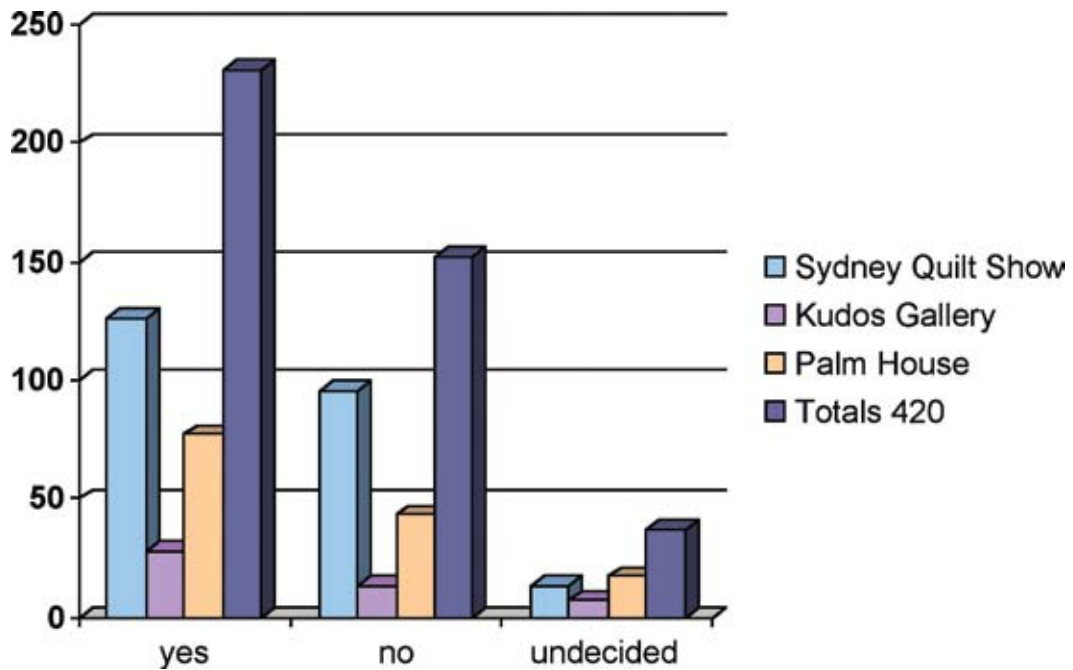


**Chart 4:** Does this change your attitude or belief in the subject?

'Question 5: Does this change your attitude or belief in the subject?', asks respondents whether after having seen the *Fresh and salt* exhibition they 'would change their attitude or belief in the subject?'. The results indicated that 30 per cent of respondents would change their attitude or belief, 67 per cent would not and three per cent were undecided across all three exhibitions. Refer to Chart 4 above for a graphical representation.

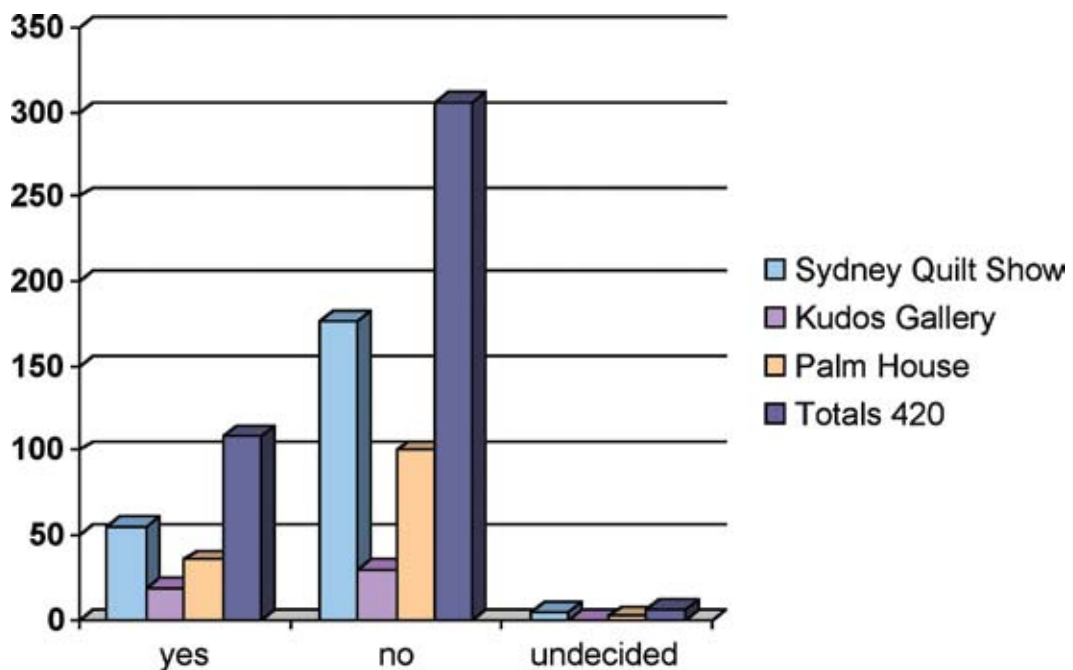
'Netting the coast' and 'Who owns the water?' at 13 per cent were the highest scoring designs for responses that *would* change their attitude or belief on the subject. Conversely, the same designs are the two highest scores for respondents who would *not* change their attitude or belief at 2.5 times more unlikely. In addition, 12 per cent of respondents would change their attitude and belief from 'we will drink it' subject.

'Pollutants affect the sea' and 'Shipping' were the only subjects where respondents would change their attitude or belief and scored higher than those who would not, although the numbers are too small to be reliable. The result is that a textile exhibition about water is twice as likely *not* change a respondent's attitude or belief in the subject.



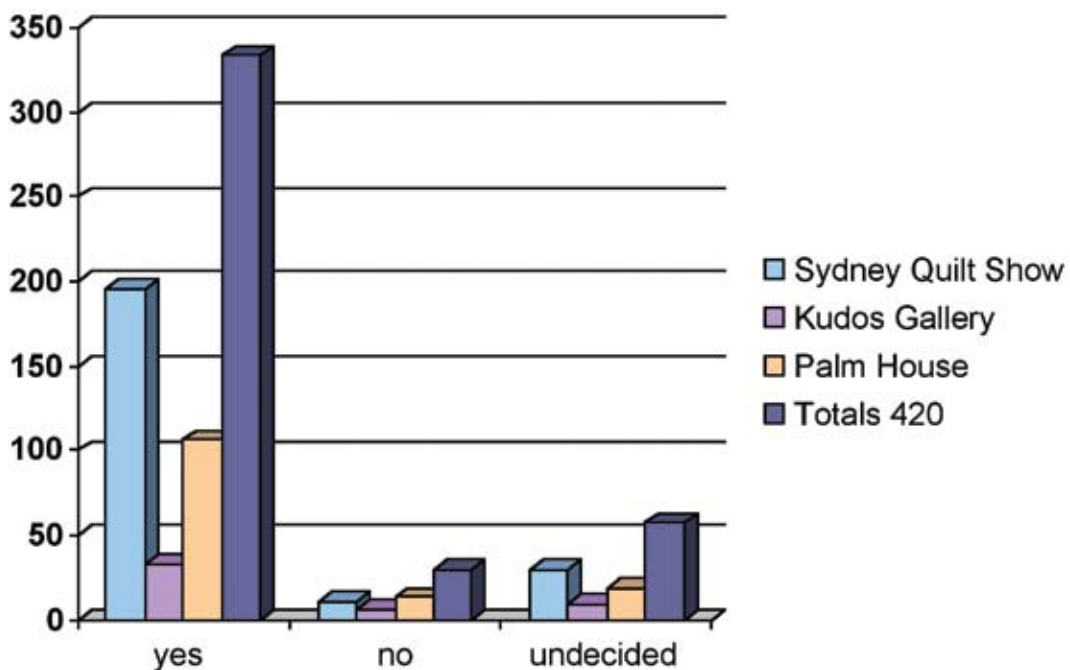
**Chart 5:** Will the new knowledge affect your attitude to water in future?

Question 6 asks 'will the new knowledge affect your attitude to water in future?' More than 50 per cent of the respondents agreed that once after having seen the textile exhibition, the new knowledge learnt at the exhibition would affect their attitude towards water in future.



**Chart 6:** Would you have expected to learn about the environment from a textile exhibition?

Even with an audience at the Sydney Quilt and Craft Show who are accustomed to looking at textile exhibitions, the majority of respondents, 75 per cent, did not expect to learn about the environment from a textile exhibition. Kudos Gallery, where the College of Fine Arts has a textile programme, had a higher percentage of respondents. Thirty eight per cent of these respondents would have expected to learn about the environment from a textile exhibition. Respondents at the Palm House, which included a number of international visitors, supported the results from the Sydney Quilt and Craft Show at 73 per cent. Refer to Chart 6 for these results.



**Chart 7:** Will you look for textiles to be a message medium in future?

Nearly 80 per cent of respondents would look for textiles to be a message medium in future and this finding was supportive of the results expected at the start of the project.

Out of the 420 respondents, surprisingly two advised that they saw the use of textiles as a message medium as, *"an inappropriate use of a public exhibition, that it opens the door to religious messages, propoganda and the political 'slag off' arena for all other action groups, government or otherwise."* Another respondent suggested, *"Let's try to keep it free from this sort of thing."* This negative response was unexpected, after a very positive response from the majority, even to the extent of respondents suggesting other venues and organisations who may also wish to display the exhibition of stitched textile banners about water in the Sydney Basin.

### 5.3 Qualitative questionnaire responses

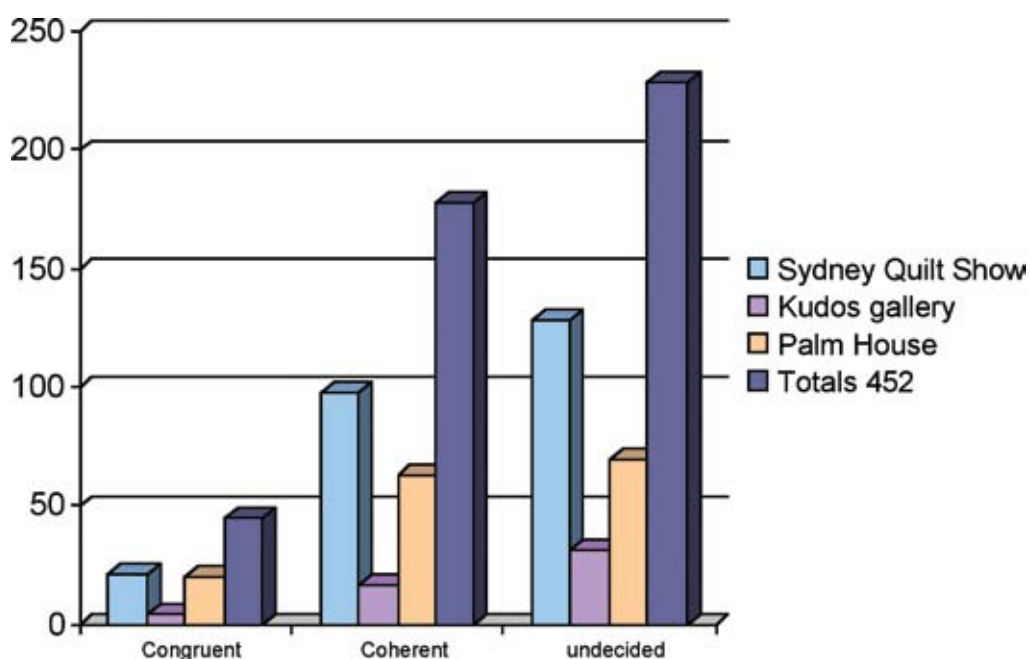
A pragmatic (Creswell 1994), approach was used to review the qualitative responses to the returned audience questionnaires. Some of the dialogue was to support the



responses. The positive response is common across the majority of respondent's questionnaires for this enquiry.

In response to 'Is the message congruent or coherent?', the design 'Netting the coast' was described as the most coherent design at 18 per cent, closely followed by the 'Who owns the water' design at 14 per cent, and 'Let rivers run' at 12 per cent. The most congruent design was the design of the banner 'Recycle H2O'.

'Who owns the water' was the design with the highest number of undecided responses as to whether the design was congruent, coherent, incongruent or incoherent, closely followed by 'We will drink it!'



**Chart 8:** *Is the message congruent or coherent?*

I believe the respondents were unclear as to the meaning of and differentiation between the terms 'congruent' and 'coherent' and therefore opted for an undecided response.

Using Leximancer software, which quantifies, describes the use of words and provides graphic representation of the linking of these words, the qualitative responses were loaded and therefore some interesting results found.



**Figure 10:** Leximancer concept map 1 (Burford 2009)

The concept map above shows a disconnection between the words *message*, *subject*, *issue*, *water*, *sea*, and *environment* and *recycled*. The word *message* disconnects itself conceptually from all the words, suggesting the audience was unable to comprehend the connection of the words.

The qualitative results appear under the heading of the three (3) questions that follow:

**Question 1** asked ‘what subject does the stitched textile present to you?’

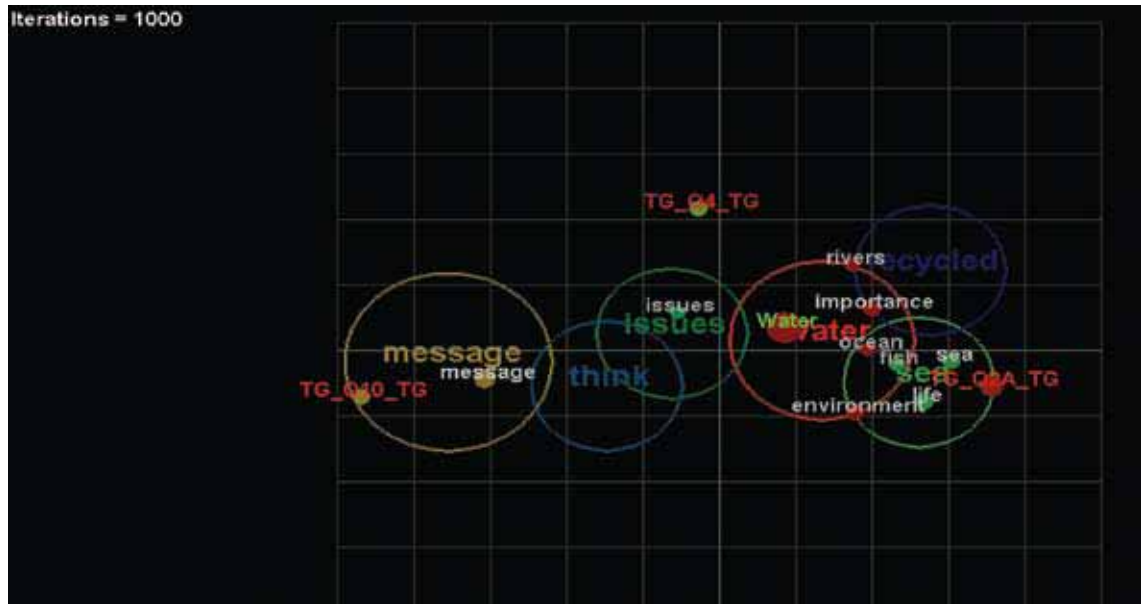
Ninety-nine per cent of respondents associated the subject of the exhibition with *water*; a resounding success for the subject matter overall.

Only 36 per cent related this question to the environment and the sea. The word *importance* of the subject rated highly as did the word *life*. Conversely, the word *recycled* and *message* rated in the low scale and from my point of view, I expected neither of these concepts would rate at all.

The Leximancer sort rated the water subject on the banners in terms of importance. The highest rated subject was proper water management, at 20 per cent. This shows the impact of ‘Netting the coast’ as a subject matter was very powerful and had a greater than expected impact on the audience. The fact that two shark attacks in Sydney Harbour were reported on the NSW news at the time and the knowledge that international visitors to Sydney are generally wary of sharks, could account for some of the intensity of the response and the variability in the results (Creswell 1994).

**Question 4** asked ‘what new knowledge did you learn from viewing the stitched textile?’

The Leximancer concept map actually shows a similar context for all of the concepts of the words: *message*, *think*, *issues*, *water*, *recycle*, and *sea* AND therefore evidence that they are linked to each other. For this question, the associated concepts have connected in the respondent’s mind which is very positive as an outcome for the big picture on water.



**Figure 11:** Leximancer concept map 2 (Burford 2009)

Interestingly, this question elicited two types of answers: one response was on the subject of the information design and the other response was about the use of textiles and techniques. The former response, I expected but the latter response was highly unexpected.

The Leximancer software findings show that 83 per cent of respondents learnt new knowledge about water, and 19 per cent learnt new knowledge about the words *importance*, the *issues*, the *message* and the *rivers*. Textiles rated 15 per cent of audience response, again, higher than expected.

In summary, the findings show that respondents felt re-energised by the subject matter, some learnt about 'Netting the coast as a subject' and others "learnt that the media in Sydney was covering access to the foreshore."

The consensus of textile findings show respondents thought "the materials are part of the message", "the textiles enrich each other", "different techniques get the message across" and 20 per cent overall responded that "communication can take many forms."

**Question 10** asked 'do you have anything else you would like to add to the discussion?' Before detailing the qualitative quotations, the Leximancer concepts associated with this question show a relationship between the *message*, *water*, *textiles* and the *exhibition*, so the concept has delivered the message.

The summary of textile findings through the Leximancer analysis shows the subject matter response has a small amount of negative context while the highest score showed respondents were "aware of environmental problems and thought about them."

In addition, the textiles/techniques responses showed 21 per cent supported the exhibition of textiles with information messages.

On the comments to Question 10, a number of respondents said the same or similar things. I have provided the responses on the subject, information on the textile banners, comments on the textiles and techniques used to make the banners.

The respondent's comments on the design of the exhibition supported my approach that each stitched textile banner was produced in the most appropriate way in order to deliver the message and that the set of 12 banners was seen as a whole, when shown as designed for the exhibition. Unexpectedly, the positive comments about the visual message for deaf or non-English speaking visitors was very constructive, *"The exhibition communicates more than the sum of its parts. Each work is enriched by the other; all the twelve pieces are original and offer very different aesthetics. You would not know it is a set if not presented as such; the exhibition is great for anyone who cannot read (or does not understand English) because of the strong visual messages they convey. As a teacher of deaf students, they are able to use the visuals to understand what is being 'said'; the circular layout connotes to the earth, nature, environment, running water, continuity etc; exhibiting this (textile exhibition) in an environment/social location that is involved in the subject matter would excite discussion."*<sup>13</sup>

The respondent's comments about the design idea and the information value of the stitched textile banners reveals an emotional response, a political response, the fact that others are concerned about the state of water conservation, the fact that the quantity of work was valued and a dissenting comment about the value of textiles as opposed to posters. The relevant comments include *"Beautiful compositions, informative but not strident messages; water conservation is an extremely important issue locally, regionally, nationally and globally. All mediums are required to get the message into the mainstream and change the way we live our daily lives; I enjoyed that so much time and effort was put into something. This meant for me that the message has a great significance to others; the amount of work done to produce this exhibition is awesome also so well researched, making the viewer 'think'. I am not sure the medium of textiles has actually added/helped your message- however, as a substrate; it has served its purpose. I am impressed with convergence of fabric, politics and the environment; artists use the medium for a purpose that is the inherent quality of textiles."*

Finally, the respondent's statements on the textiles and techniques included a series of emotive comments about likes and dislikes, analogies between the environment and textiles and the potency of beauty. Those comments include *"I feel that these works did not need written texts to express the concepts and intention of the message; Great to see people using recycled materials as the source of their art. We need to, as artists, become sustainable and aware of our wastefulness; some [of the banners] were very beautiful and startling, some were preaching. I preferred the more subtle*

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<sup>13</sup> The Fresh and salt exhibition was displayed at the Sydney Fish Markets in November 2009 to assist OceanWatch to survey the Market's fisherman about their program 'Tide to table' conservation.

*messages; I enjoyed the colour – knowledge doesn't always engender action, but involving the emotions will be more conducive to change;" and "the work is beautiful & meaningful – the beauty draws one in & the message then has potency."*

#### 5.4. Textiles as communication

To respond to the proposition that *'An understanding of information design and audience comprehension in an exhibition setting can inform the textile's ability to communicate an environmental message, particularly about water,'* the quantitative responses certainly support the idea that textiles can provide information to an audience. There was confirmation that respondents learnt new information about water and that in future, they will look for textiles to be a message medium.

The qualitative responses supported the exhibition as a whole piece of information and the divergence in technique, textiles or subject was not a negative in the respondent's comments.

On the other hand, from the limited questionnaire, I am unable to assess whether the audience opinion and understanding would change if the subject for the textile exhibition were other than the environment and water.

From the many qualitative comments on the water subjects presented in the *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles* exhibitions, the design criteria used that were successful included:

- use of information design;
- including image/text;
- colourful and emotive designs;
- including scientific and researched details;
- including recycled and gifted textiles; and
- allowing the textile tradition to speak.

The textiles for *Fathoming the depths: informative textiles* exhibition were developed using the findings from the questionnaire analysis and are discussed in detail in Part 2, Chapter 10: *'Fathoming'*.

#### 5.5. Conclusion

The significance of the findings of this research show that there is a segment of the population who respond to textiles, whether they are in a gallery or other exhibition space, and that they are also open to a medium with a message.

Conversely, additional research would be required to ascertain whether textiles are a tool in the wider range of media at the disposal of the design communication community.

## CHAPTER 6

# Research conclusion: informative!

### 6.1. Introduction

I have explored the informational value of textiles as a communication tool and the ability to inform an audience on issues of environmental importance, through the politics of water, as the basis for this research.

The proposition was *“An understanding of information design and audience comprehension in an exhibition setting can inform the textile’s ability to communicate an environmental message, particularly about water.”*

In order to provide an exhibition and an audience response with statistical data to confirm the proposition, textiles banners presented the political, social and environmental issues concerning water in the early twenty-first century in the Sydney Basin. The analysis of the researched textiles for information value, the theoretical framework, published press water subjects and audience research, all helped to develop the design of 12 stitched textile banners for the exhibition *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles*.

The theoretical framework and the overall exhibition concept discussed in Chapter 4, and the discourse and the development of the textile banner designs are explained in Part 2: Studio Practice, and Chapter 8: *‘Fresh and salt’*.

The layers of meaning, embedded subjects, revealed and concealed ideas and mapping of the often-invisible landscapes in order to reflect and interpret the stratum of information and its value to the audience, was all evident when used to create the stitched textile banners.

As defined by Troy in *The Modernist textile*, *“through their imagery, techniques and function, textiles can carry cultural information on a variety of levels that other medium are unable to do. So textiles can be understood as encapsulated social documents of the era”* (Troy 2006: p. 169).

### 6.2. Information design and audience

Through the study of historical textile cases, such as the Bayeau tapestry (1066), the banners of union members for the Australian Natives Association (1907) and Fanny

Shaw's 'Prosperity quilt' (1930), this research has established that textiles have previously been used to provide information on the politics of an environment. In these cases, the environments varied but included a political invasion, as well as the Union's pride in the Australian landscape and the world depression after the crash of capitalism in the 1930s.

The study of these three examples provide different ways of presenting information, i.e., the Bayeau tapestry provided a subjective image (Fitzgerald 2002): in that it portrays all there is to know about the 'embarking of Harold to sail the sea'. It models the story idea, as it is not something that a large number of Harold's people could have observed or put into context. That is not to say, that attendees did not have input to the design of the non-representational textile.

The meaning of the Bayeau Tapestry composition (Kress 1996), is supported by different elements including: the informational value of the elements in relation to each other, the larger scale of the figures to the ships and the use of symbols in the framing of top and bottom in order to engage the emotion of the audience. The Bayeau Tapestry directly influenced the design of the stitched textile banner 'Shipping' in both the format and layout of the informational value.

The Australian Natives Association banner is a subjective image with a central point of view used to solicit pride in the men (women were excluded from the ANA at this time) and involved in the Australian native landscape. The elements in the design are placed to attract the audience's attention and are framed and connected in order to signify belonging and pride. This sample of a communication textile has defined the format for the banners used in the exhibition, *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles* and specifically influenced the design of the individual banners entitled 'Who owns the water?' 'Desalination' and 'Recycle H2O'. The Literature Review research showed that the use of various mediums and techniques on banners is not restricted and allows the banner to herald the introduction of new ideas and information to the audience.

Fanny Shaw's 'Prosperity quilt' is a unique textile that uses humour to engage the audience at a time when humour for many was in short supply: there is, as the quilt suggests, always another perspective. The elements attract attention with the consistency of the repeated format and each block labelled in embroidered text for clarity and breadth of information. The stitched textile banner 'We will drink it!' successfully used humour to engage the audience. Alternatively 'Netting the coast' used another emotion: the horror of sea creatures drowning in ghost nets, in order to engage the audience.

Contemporary textiles in the twenty-first century use the textile medium to deliver messages that have metamorphosed from a simple banner in order to voice a concern, where the politics of situations are often beyond the control of the audience.

The textile artist, r e a used the long cloth format to express her Aboriginal people's ownership of the land on the 'Resistance' flag. Another textile artist Linda Gass from

California, used strikingly colourful images of the San Francisco Bay area on silk to inform her audience about the historic and contemporary politics affecting this water environment, in her work entitled 'Puzzle of salt'. In Australia, Beth Hatton in 'Selection #1 – sheep' used 'imagetext' in tapestry weaving to name the extinct native species, over the naming of introduced species and for this work to also act as a metaphor for the struggle of coexistence in the Australian landscape. Susan Shie, a textile artist also in the USA, has highlighted the plight of the residents of the city of New Orleans after the devastation of hurricane Katrina using hand written text all over the quilt entitled 'Katrina blues'.

The impact on my thinking from textile designs from the four examples studied, led me to explore ways of creating different ways of seeing and presenting information. The 'Resistance' flag is a subjective image with a central point of view and was made to elicit an emotional response as a metaphor for the survival of Indigenous people since British settlement in 1788. The symbolic colour, size and scale of the text on 'Resistance' influenced the colour, size and scale of the text on all 12 banners for the exhibition, allowing variation to temper the message. Rea's use of a long cloth set a precedent by reinforcing my concept for the 12 stitched textile banners and influencing the Studio Practice for the *Fathoming* textiles discussed in Part 2, Chapter 10: 'Fathoming'.

Linda Gass' textile designs had a direct influence on the '*Let rivers run*' design by inspiring the use of an objective and topographical image of the Sydney Basin river systems, water storage and supply for the Greater Sydney area. The map image is a model of the bio-geographical area known as the Sydney Basin, which is visible in its entirety from space and defines the physical area of the research.

The diagrammatical representation of the Sydney Basin shows the fresh and saltwater sources in the region, their relation to each other and the centres of population. These elements exist in reality and show the interconnectivity and relative sizes. The diagram sits within the edges of the background textile and the structural faults on land and sea close the shape, in a similar fashion to Gass' work. The powerful use of intense colour in Gass' work has also influenced the design of the '*River is for fish*' banner.

The successful 'imagetext' of Beth Hatton's 'Selection #1 – sheep' has influenced the use of text on the stitched textile banner designs especially '*Recycle H2O*'.

Susan Shies' use of handwritten text also directly influenced the information value of '*Desalination*' and the presentation of the image value, showing the location and construction of the plant at Kurnell in Sydney.

The impact of the researched textiles on the design and development of the new textiles for the exhibition *Fathoming the depths: informative textiles*, are discussed in Chapter 9: '*Fluidity and transparency*' and Chapter 10: '*Fathoming*'.



### 6.3. Exhibitions and audience questionnaire

*Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles*, the exhibition of 12 double-sided stitched textile banners were exhibited in a circular or oval format. The proposition that the stitched textile banners were to be exhibited was confirmed in the case study interview with Professor Amanda Lawson, when she stated that “*Respondents see an exhibition as an informal learning environment so are able to say they have learnt something they did not know before*” (Muir 2008: pers. comms). The 12-stitched textile banners were displayed at three separate exhibition venues and at each, the audience received a voluntary questionnaire to complete and return.

The analysis of the 420 responses from the audience showed that there is a segment of the population who respond to textiles; whether they are in a gallery or other exhibition space, and they are open to the medium having a message. One of the respondents to the questionnaire stated: “*the backing on Japanese silk kimono is an interesting format and choices considering Oz water resources are a rare thing.*” My assumption was therefore, that the textiles are rare, recycled and that the same applied to water in the mind of the respondent.

### 6.4. Questionnaire results

The anticipated significance of this research is indicative in the results of the audience analysis in Chapter 5: *Information outfall*. The documentation quantifies a pragmatic interpretation of how people interact with textiles that have a message and the confirmation of the proposition. More specifically, after experiencing the exhibition:

- 80 per cent of respondents would look for textiles to be a message medium in the future;
- 83 per cent of respondents learnt new knowledge about the water subject after having viewed the exhibitions of stitched textile banners;
- 73 per cent of respondents would not have expected to learn about the environment from a textiles exhibition;
- 77 per cent of respondents learnt something they did not know before seeing the textile exhibitions;
- 30 per cent said the exhibition would change their attitude to and belief in water in the future but 70 per cent would not; and
- The qualitative analysis overwhelmingly shows the audience understood that the subject of the exhibition and stitched textile banners was ‘water’.

The results of the questionnaire responses have extended existing research by contextualising textiles as a communication medium. As one respondent at the Palm House, Royal Botanic Gardens said, “*the subject has been relayed in a way that is very visually beautiful, & this impacts me & hones the message more deeply inside for me than reading about it.*”

By using published newspaper and internet articles about fresh and saltwater issues in the Sydney Basin, I have documented an alternative methodological approach to presenting published information as a way of exploring textile practice. This published information defined the subjects for each of the 12 textile banners and the contextualisation for the exhibition, *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles*.

The value of detailed research revealed in the case study interview with Linda Gass that it enhanced the published newspaper and internet articles and was invaluable for the design subjects of the stitched textile banners. Confirmation of the value of detailed information is in the qualitative responses from the audience.

The stitched textile banners and exhibition, *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles* have extended the use of research methodology in Studio Practice as part of this document. As one respondent commented in the returned questionnaires, “*this (exhibition) is an effective & powerful meeting between art, science, politics and sociology.*”

For the Master of Design (Hons) assessment exhibition *Fathoming the depths: informative textiles*, this methodology has been extended to include the outcomes of the qualitative and quantitative analysis. The development of new textiles as a ‘wet abstract’<sup>14</sup> using ‘imagetext’ has the ability to recontextualise the textiles for this project. Part 2: Studio Practice, discusses this component of the project.

### 6.5. Case study interviews

From the case study interviews with the three practitioners, a number of research practices they have used, have been enlightening and informative and will continue to influence my work.

Linda Gass’ art quilts about the San Francisco Bay area and the water problems started with a lot of reading in books, online and in magazines in order to collect information and maps, prior to designing a new textile. This level of research was challenging but has become a technique I will continue to use for future textiles.

Jennifer Turpin, in the case study interview expressed her philosophy on public space artwork, as her need to make artwork for the ‘big world’. Jennifer said, “*If you invoke a bodily response then you have the audience’s interest and attention.*” Jennifer believes it is the artist/designer’s role to create something, about which the audience will want to know more. She went on to explain that the audience’s opinion does not mean that you have to compromise the artwork/design, but as long as the audience enjoy the work, it ultimately enriches their lives.

Professor Amanda Lawson is an experienced arts administrator and manager with a background in cultural enterprise development and the management of craft centres. She gave some advice about the audience, explaining that, “*Respondents*

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14 Refer to Definition of terms

*see an exhibition as an informal learning environment so are able to say they have learnt something they did not know before*". This information made the use of the questionnaire at the exhibitions *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles* even more powerful, as the results again, supported her earlier findings.

## 6.6. Recent textile exhibitions

Since 2006 and the start of this research, a number of textile exhibitions have been shown both in Australia and internationally that have utilized textiles as a message medium. Fairfield City Museum and Stein Gallery in Sydney held a textile exhibition in September and October 2009 entitled *Artcloth: Engaging New Visions*. This exhibition set a challenge to 21 selected international textile artists to produce new or innovative contemporary textiles that engaged with environmental issues. The three metre by one metre exhibited textiles did not confine their subject to the natural environment. The textiles illustrated subjects as poignant as Jane Dunnewold's *'Sacred planet 1: the myth of human superiority'*, in which crumbling human skeletons are lost within the manipulated digital repeat pattern images of the cloth. Norma Starszakowna's *'Razing/Raising walls, Warsaw'* presents the wall as protection, separation and control, particularly in relation to her father's footsteps in Warsaw, Poland and acts as a direct metaphor for lives in Gaza today (Wisniowski 2009).

Both textiles described above and the current Momentum textiles have all used visual images on cloth to deliver a message about the politics of an environmental situation, which I am delighted to say supports my proposition that *'textiles have the ability to communicate an environmental message'*. Just in the last two years, many more designers are using the medium of textiles to create a voice in the world.

Valerie Kirk curated the current exhibition touring Australia from the Tamworth Textile Biennial entitled *Momentum*. Kirk explained in the catalogue, *"Artists (and textile designers in the exhibition) deal with contemporary ideas and issues reflecting back to the population and projecting forward, provoking critical thinking and debate. Environmental concerns, issues of migration, place and identity, our relationship to nature and the constructed world, politics and social change are investigated in contemporary textile practice"* (Kirk 2008).

## 6.7. Conclusion

This project is testimony to the study of information design and audience comprehension, which has driven the design of the stitched textile banners in order to create an audience response.

It is evident that eighty-three per cent of respondents, through the pragmatic analysis of returned questionnaires, learnt new knowledge within the informal learning environment of an exhibition.

The analysis of qualitative responses confirmed the textile's ability to communicate an environmental message, particularly about 'water'.

PART TWO  
Studio Practice



## CHAPTER 7

## The quilt and other textiles

**7.1. Introduction**

The stitched textiles that I produced by 1993 had discarded the rules taught to me as a seamstress and a quilter. Instead, I concentrated on the design concept, message, ideas and colour of the textiles. Working on a series about environmental, political and personal issues on textiles, I evolved a distinctive signature style. This style allowed the textiles to present my personal voice on Australian environmental problems (Luther 2005).

**7.2. My textiles prior to 2006**

By 1996, self-expression was vital and the ability to create beautiful images in silk achieved the aim of presenting my personal opinion about the Australian environment and adding some political comment to the message: through my textile voice.

At around the year 2000, water became the driving force in my textile work. The national political debate of monarchy versus a republic was topical when Australia celebrated the Centenary of Federation. 'Reflection: the autumn of an Australian monarchy' used reflected water in autumn tones as a metaphor for the end of the monarchy.

A frustration in my Project management practice was reduced with the making of 'Short poppies are valuable too' in 2000, which was subsequently accepted to be exhibited at the Quilt National 2001, in the USA.

Twelve new textiles were completed for a solo exhibition *'Aquamarine: recent textiles by Alison Muir'* at Mosman Art Gallery in November 2005 (Finnegan 2005). These textiles present water as a precious resource and illustrate the impacts of pollution, affects of salinity and the expensive habits of Sydney Harbour's inhabitants.

Also made for the solo exhibition 'Medium is the message' is a textile collage, using drops of rain made from water reports, newspaper articles cut into long strips and fused on one side and the captions from the same articles on the reverse as hail.

Email etiquette where the use of the upper case and bold font is used is to shout: is a form of double coding. The drops of rain rendered in the text about the Sydney water problems gave the audience more information in a subtle way: through 'imagetext'.

The inclusion of gold strips symbolise that water can be as precious as gold. The large scale of the work served to reinforce the problem as being bigger than human scale

and that it is raining down on all of us, politicians included: through a metaphor. The photocopied text fused to a single panel of silk organza, which represented the lack of transparency in government solving the problem, was another metaphor. The image of 'Clean up the Act' illustrated the fact that the Sydney Harbour Trust did not have sufficient funding to assist local government with cleaning up the harbour foreshore.

'Wave 2: a memorial' was made in 2005 to remind us of the power of the sea and its devastating affects on the environment. This work uses an image; a powerful tsunami wave, with pieces of printed press and photographs interleaved into the rising wave, to brief the audience.

All the works discussed use my signature style and are examples of early work where the picture theory was still developing in my consciousness. The process used to develop the design of each textile work has evolved with time and experience. The designs usually start with a political statement or an article from the press and with the addition of historical, social and economic data. With this information and the relevant cloth, the designs then develop into a gathering of mapped issues put together with a water landscape in order to enhance the communication of the idea.

In my work, mapping is used on many levels; the two most common are the physical map of the region and the metaphysical journey of the water in the textile. The abstract work of Aboriginal Australian artists Dorothy Napangardi, Gloria Petyarre and Judy Watson has heavily influenced my textile design work over the last decade.

Images of my textile work prior to 2006 follows:



**Figure 12:** *'Clean up the Act' 2005. 115cm high x 102.5cm wide.*

This quilt is made from commercial, hand-dyed and hand-painted silks with fused appliqué, digital collage and machine quilting techniques (quilt construction).





**Figure 13: 'Medium is the message' 2005. 268cm high x 110cm wide.**

Made from commercial silk voile, embroidered voile and paper with fused appliqué, collage and machine stitching techniques.



**Figure 14: 'Reflection: the autumn of an Australian monarchy' 1999. 120cm high x 193cm wide.**

Made using commercial silks, polyester, voile and lame, cotton back, felt interlayer, fused appliqué, and machine quilting techniques (quilt construction).



**Figure 15:** *'The wave 2: in memorial'* 2005. 140cm high x 105cm wide.

Made using commercial silk, recycled silk, hand-dyed silk, fused appliqué, digital collage and machine-quilting techniques (quilt construction).

### 7.3. Conclusion

Since embarking on the quest to raise awareness of the ecology of water and the politics of its environment through my textile designs in 1993—the way the community views textiles has also changed. This research document is part of the published research into the changing role of textiles as a communication tool.



## CHAPTER 8

## Fresh and salt

**8.1. Introduction to the 12 stitched textile banners for enquiry**

Part 1 of this document provided a context in which development of the proposition that *'An understanding of information design and audience comprehension in an exhibition setting can inform the textile's ability to communicate an environmental message, particularly about water'* had been placed.

Part 2: Studio Practice and the Chapter 8: *'Fresh and salt'* documents research the design subjects, design development and making of the 12 stitched textile banners for the audience to respond to the questionnaire.

**8.2. Why fresh and salt water in the Sydney Basin**

Reference is made to the Australian Government's historical context (DAFFA 2006) by way of background information to water reform in Australia. In 2006 the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet produced a Water Reform paper (Cabinet 2006) and ScienceAlert (Australia and New Zealand) produced a number of papers to raise their concern about the fact that all stakeholders need to come together and collaborate to solve the problems of water *'in everyone's hand'*. The paper entitled *'Dismantling our water past'* by Peter J. Crawford (Crawford 2007) was highly critical of the National Water Initiative and the lack of a systemic approach from the Australian Government under John Howard.

Water resources and catchment management information was provided from The Centre for Policy Development, a new and independent public interest think tank through its website [www.cpbs.apana.org.au](http://www.cpbs.apana.org.au) (White 2006).

Mapping of the surface water system in Australia was provided from The Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, under the former Howard Liberal Government (Heritage 2006) and was updated by the Labour Rudd Government during the period of this enquiry.

The research for the stitched textile banners focussed on the bio-geographical area known as the Sydney Basin, which is the southern section of a 3000 kilometre long north-south trough called the Sydney-Bowan Basin. The Basin subsided about 290 million years ago and is situated from north Queensland to the NSW south coast

(Attwooll 2000). The NSW Department of Primary Industry (DPI) has a similar map of the Sydney Basin also showing the edge of the continental shelf (Industry 2007).

Why the Sydney Basin? Because I live in Sydney, it is the largest city in Australia and because I am passionate about water; both fresh and salt, and am interested in exploring how humans must have a sustainable water supply if we are to survive on the driest continent on earth: Australia

### **8.3. Water publications and subjects**

#### **8.3.1. Water publications**

Publications available through newspapers, television news and the internet in Sydney about fresh and salt water in the Sydney Basin, collected for the period of January 2006 to December 2008, defined the subjects. This methodology was chosen on the basis that if the subject was 'news' it was a topical item worth further investigation, research and for this information to be disseminated to a wider audience. The publications were printed, dated, filed in hard copy and saved into a computer filing system under the same subject or idea.

The publications on the Sydney Basin and the background to water in Australia provide a context for the water subjects and are available in an information design diary.

By entering the selected water subject publications into a database of texts, sorting them into major themes and issues and then analysing the information in depth, groups of subjects emerged. The aim was to distil the information down to a fundamental list of six words and images per water subject.

During the information collection phase it became evident that 12 subjects, based on some fresh and some salt water, were topical and would be available for further research. An information design and development diary for each subject contains the publication information, hand sketch drawings of design development and photographic images of the making for each of the 12 stitched textile banners.

A further design and development diary contains the exhibition design information and criteria, under '8.6 Exhibition design and development'.

Each banner subject has a list of 5 to 6 references contained in the design diaries.

#### **8.3.2. Banner references**

The references shown in brackets refer to the Textile Bibliography that follows the Research Bibliography. Those publications and documents with dates earlier than 2006 surfaced through a 'Google alert' set up on my studio computer during the period January 2006 to January 2008.

**Banner One: 'Recycle H2O'**

1. H2O molecules and image. (Magazine 2007), (Wilson 2007), (Water 2007), (Government 2006).
2. Water cycle and rotation of water. (Haywood 2007), (Kruszwinicki 2006).
3. More valuable than gold. (Trute 2007), (Devine 2007), (Conservation 2007), (Matilda 2007).
4. Recycled water is fresh and salt. (Indymedia 2006), (Education 2007), (Khan 2006), (Mark 2006), (Institute 2007), (Pearce 2007), (Muir 2007), stormwater (AAP 2006), (Water 2006), (Metherell 2007), (Matthews 2007).
5. Magical water blue gold, sustainable, (Cabinet 2004), (Devine 2007), (Environment 2006), (Komidar 2000), (Khan 2007).
6. Water country aboriginal landscape (Layton 2004), (Devine 2007).
7. Gifted textiles provided after a request by email to 150 contacts (pers. comms Saunders, Ricketts, Irvine-Nealie, Billingsley, Morgan, Walker, Wilson, Wright, Firth, Marchandean, Schulze, Burford, Walton, Stoneman, Solomon, Rice, Finnegan, Stening, Cameron, Tilley Winyard, Zell, Dennis, Clarke, Gebhart, Child, Lugg, Timms, Stein, Painter, Wright, Green, Quail, Huskins, Sullivan, Caldicott and Bills)

**Banner Two: 'Let rivers run'**

1. Sydney Basin rivers map, maintain rivers, (Bones 2006), (National Parks 2007), (Horton 2005), (Industries 2007), (Elder 2007), (Molitoris 2008), (Mitchell 2007), (Khan 2006).
2. Catchment areas, aquifers and dams, Regenerate rivers lakes and wetlands (Government 2006), aquifers (Frew 2006), (AAP 2006), (Waterways 2006), (Timms 2007).
3. Hunter River photograph source, (Greenpeace 2007), (Silvester 2001), (McIlveen 2007).
4. Shoalhaven River photograph source, (Sullivan 2007), (Crouch 2007).
5. Bores and farmers Restore rivers from source to sea (Government 2006), (Farmonline 2007), (Telegraph 2007), (Australian 2005), (Wahlquist 2006).

**Banner Three: 'River is for fish'**

1. Map of river water, (National Parks 2007), (NSW 2001), (Unknown 1950's).
2. 'Drain is just for water' stencil, (Muir 2008).
3. River provides accommodation for fish, (NSW 2001), (News 2007).
4. Dual landscapes with layers of meaning, (Silvester 2001), (iPOD 2007), (CaesarStone 2007), (Wawrzynczak 2007).
5. Blue green algae, (Mitchell 2007).

6. Flooding is natural cleansing, (Bones 2006), (Stoop 2007), (McIlveen 2007), (AAP 2006), (Prato 2007), (Warren 2007), (Woodford 2007).
7. Aeration of water is healthy, (Kamenetzky 2007), (Woodford 2007), (Myers 2007).
8. Supply for food and drinking water, (Conservation 2007), (Industries 2007), (Trute 2007), (Crouch 2007).

**Banner Four: 'We will drink it!'**

1. Purple tap for recycled water, (Khan 2006).
2. Water cycle, (Haywood 2007), (Kruszwinicki 2006).
3. Toilet to tap cycle, (Horstman 2006), (Editorial 2006), (Frew 2006), (Khan 2006), (O'Neill 1993).
4. Recycled water, (Institute 2007), (Mark 2006), (Pearce 2007), (Water 2006), (Salins 2007), (Davies 2007), (Matthews 2007).
5. Drinkable water, (Breusch 2004), (Kruszwinicki 2006), (Masterson 2007), (Water 2007), (Editorial 2006), (Frew 2005), (Metherell 2007), (Water 2007).
6. Guardia and virus threat, (Khan 2006), (Schofield 2006), (Wilde 2005), (Wertheim 2006), (Water 2006).

**Banner Five: 'Who owns the water?'**

1. No new commercial surface water licences in NSW, (News 2007).
2. Water rights NOT tied to land ownership, (Industries 2007), (Telegraph 2007).
3. Price of farmers' licences, (Davies 2007), (Farmonline 2007), (Wahlquist 2006), (Sharemarket 2007).
4. Government ownership of groundwater, (Devine 2007), (Frew 2006), (AAP 2006), (Waterways 2006).
5. Drinking water vs. river health, (Breusch 2004), (Khan 2006), (Mitchell 2007), (Editorial 2006).
6. Tank water collects more than catchments and aquifers, (ABC 2007), (Khan 2007), (Timms 2007).
7. Roof water vs. groundwater, (Davies 2007).

**Banner Six: 'Reduce ocean outfalls'; the discharge of fresh water into salt water**

1. 450 billion litres discharged very year through ocean outfalls, (Khan 2006), (Enquirer 2006), (Society 2006), (Peatling 2007), (O'Neill 1993).
2. Image of tied up tap, (Editorial 2006).
3. Ocean's inability to take up more, (Sydney 2005), (Smith 2007).
4. Ocean as clean coast (Innovation 2006), (Frew 2007), (Wangmann 2007), (Unknown 2007), (News 2007), (Novotel 2007).
5. RMA grid of outfall locations and impacts, (Miller 2005), (Smith 1994).
6. Oysters' inability to survive the pollution, (Higson 2007), (News 2007).

**Banner Seven: 'Netting the coast'**

1. Nets to protect humans from sea creatures, (Creagh 2007), (Baird 2006), (Wilder 2007), (Brandon 2007), (Khoury 2007), (Badham 1941), (West 2007), (Feature 2007), (Hadgraft 2007).
2. Nets trap whales, dolphin, rare fish, turtles and endangered creatures, (White 2007), (Centre 2006), (Defence 2007), (Stephens 2007), (Mordue 2007).
3. Nets left behind from commercial fishers are ghosts, (News 2007), (Butler 2006).
4. Pollution to the coastal areas, (Macey 2007), (Carment 2007), (Jordan Baker 2008), (Golding 2007).
5. Nets are false risk avoidance, (Aland 2004), (Editorial 2007), (Baker 2006), (Wilder 2007), (Gibson 2008).

**Banner Eight: 'Foreshore access'**

1. Harbour is a carpark for boats, (Munro 2007), (Wellings 2006), (Times 2007), (Munro 2007).
2. Shrinking public access to foreshore, (Domain 2006), (Gilmore 2007), (Singer 2007), (Bibby 2007).
3. Commercialisation of harbour for \$, (Australian 2005), (Jopson 2007), (Baker 2007), (Editor 2007).
4. Value of properties with jetties, (Jopson 2007), (Jopson 2007), (Wellings 2006), (Tillett 2007), (Qantas 2007), (Robinson 2007), (Singer 2007).
5. Small boat owners ousted for millionaires, (Tillett 2007), (Besser 2007).
6. Change of government/Maritime Services Board rules for foreshore, (Jopson 2007), (Wellings 2006), (Jopson 2007), (Munro 2007),
7. Environmental impacts, (NSW 2001), (Haggith 2005), (Chantler 2006), (CSIRO), (Aubrey 2007), (Domain 2006), (Qantas 2007), (Gilmore 2007), (Robinson 2007), (Sheridan 2006), (Bibby 2007), (Baker 2007), (Editor 2007), (Creagh 2007), (Editor 2007), (Macey 2008).

**Banner Nine: 'Pollutants affect the sea'**

1. Fresh and salt water pollute each other, (Wilde 2005), (Smee 2006), (Pollard 2007), (Coleman 2006), (Khan 2006).
2. Anoxic seas and algal bloom, (Smee 2006), (Alexander 2006), (Woldendorp 2004), (Chantler 2006), (Khoury 2008), (Fearon 2006).
3. Industrial pollution dioxins affect fish, (Woodford 2007), (Smee 2006), (Wilde 2005), (Campion 2007), (Sikora 2006), (Department of Environment 2007), (Miller 1974).
4. Plastic bags as major polluter, (Warren 2006).
5. Oyster demise due to virus, (Online 2007), (Higson 2007).
6. Symbols: o for oxygen, H<sub>2</sub>O for water, (Australia 2007), (Mordue 2007), (Engering 2006), (Williams 2008).

**Banner Ten: 'Shipping'**

1. Aquatic ecosystems of harbours and ports, (Baum 2007), (Chase 2000).
2. Barnacles grow on everything, (EICC 2005).
3. Saltwater rusts metal, (Murphy 2006).
4. Water horizons risks, (McKenzie 2006).
5. Marine pests cause hull fouling, (EICC 2005), (Graffitti 2005).
6. Marine pests invade ballast water, (Cribb 2007), (Hutchings 2008), (Murphy 2006), (Grant 2002).
7. What are the introduced marine pests in Sydney Basin?, (Igoe 2006), (Hewitt 2002), (Berents 2002).
8. Oil spills and natural seepage, (Australia 2005), (Salter 1999), (Duke 1999), (GPA).

**Banner Eleven: 'Sea country'**

1. Commercial licences to harvest from sea, (Meares 2006), (Penfold 2008), (Industries 2005).
2. Ocean is for fish, (Sullivan 2007), (Darby 2007).
3. Fish types disappearing, (Centre 2006), (Sages 2003), (So 2007).
4. Marine parks reduce access, (Doblin 2006), (So 2007).
5. Aboriginal sea rights laws, (Christophersen 2007), (Murphy 2004), (Dillon 2001).
6. Conflicting custodians of the ocean, aboriginal, commercial, government and recreational fisherman, (Frew 2007), (BRW 2006), (Cultura 2005), (Harnwell 2006), (Hawkins 2004), (Thumbs 2008), (Edmaier 2007)
7. Aboriginal sea country, (Horton 2005), (Yunupinu 2007), (Heiss 2002).

**Banner Twelve: 'Desalination', the conversion of salt water into fresh water**

1. Kurnell delicate and damaged, (Scott 2007), (Water 2007), (Earth 2007).
2. Pipeline locations affect habitat, (Khan 2007), (Designs 2007).
3. Osmosis forcing water to desalt, (Water 2007), (Creighton 2007).
4. Increased cost of water, (Water 2007), (Pearlman 2007), (Frew 2007), (Clennell 2007), (Age 2007), (AAP 2007), (Sharemarket 2007), (Water 2006), (Macey 2007), (Hinman 2007).
5. Released brine back into the ocean affecting environment, (Griffin 2005), (Water 2007), (Creighton 2007), (Khan 2007).
6. Damage to marine ecosystem, (Khan 2007), (Burgman 2006).

**8.4. Banner design and development**

From the theoretical framework and visual language research in Part 1, Chapter 4: '*Layers of meaning*', the following design criteria developed the water subjects and built the visual images:

1. images that create a message/information/visual narrative;
2. an idea that is political or has political significance;
3. images to include meaning derived from mapping;
4. information containing symbols or motifs that have meaning;
5. the use of cloth where the materials/fabrics have other meanings or messages;
6. the use of 'imagetext' in order to provide meaning;
7. the use of textile's with previous use or contextualisation; and
8. providing many layers of meaning

Having defined the banner subjects, I set the criteria for the banner designs and in some cases researched textiles and designers who had produced work of interest. The usual design process of absorbing information, examining preliminary ideas, reviewing and rearranging the design also applied. Much of this process included using marks on paper, collage both formal and informal, sample textile pieces that are actually heat set/dyed/painted/cut/fused/stitched etcetera, as prototypes for the final works. Some examples of the sample textiles are included in Chapter 9, under 9.4 *Materials and techniques*.

From my research, I am aware that every textile has a number of formal components, resulting from the technologies used to make them and the social practices of the audience who later view them. The modality most important to my research was the composition of the banner design, the impact of the design and the process of making a design to be successful in delivering the message in an exhibition environment. The audience component was serendipitous and the exhibition location would have an impact on the answers of the respondents in the questionnaires.

A number of decisions made about the textile banners that would reinforce the layers of meaning in the messages for the audience, included:

1. The banner subject sequence; the list of banners subjects starts notionally with 'recycling water'. The subjects neatly divide into the two separate types of water: fresh and salt. At Banner 6, the subject crosses from fresh water to salt with 'Reduce ocean outfalls,' and at Banner 12, the subject crosses back from salt to fresh with 'Desalination'. This order was intentional; used to reinforce the cyclical nature of the water environment and reinforced the circular exhibition layout of textile banners, discussed later in this chapter;
2. The use of recycled and gifted kimono for the base cloth of the banners such as:
  - There is a Japanese tradition of recycling textiles into padded garments such as the 'saki-ori' of the Meiji period (Yoshida 1994). Annually, the Japanese export container loads recycled kimono and cloth and exports it to the UK, USA and Australia. The Japanese are great recyclers of their textiles to other cultures. Comprehension of the concept is evident from the respondent's comment below: *"Great to see people using recycled materials as the*

*source of their art and design. We need to, as artists and designers, become sustainable and aware of our wastefulness.*" The recycled kimono satisfied the design criteria of 'previous use, symbols and motifs and materials with layers of meanings' as previously identified.

- The Japanese tradition of using garments to illustrate the environment in the shibori designs of contemporary and ancient kimono and haki-mori. Many of the designs illustrate water or water environments. I saw this as an advantage as the colours and patterns would add another layer of meaning to the message.
  - The deconstructed recycled garments (kimono) reconstructed into a banner shape and size reinforced the human stature, the subject was 'facing' the audience, suggesting that the issues rest on all shoulders. The idea of the cloth hanging as a 'totem'<sup>15</sup> of knowledge refers to the Australian Aboriginal icons and traditions;
3. The use of textile techniques that support the subject and the message;
  4. The use of colours that have symbolic meaning;
  5. The use 'imagetext' that reinforced and added to the subject;
  6. The use of double-sided textile banners which heralded the subject on one side and provide sufficient space for detailed information on the other, when in the circular exhibition layout;
  7. The choice of opaque cloth allowed the subject and ideas on one side not be visible or bleed from the reverse;
  8. The banner display mechanism supported the textiles from the underside of the top and allowed the cloth to sway with the movement of the audience;
  9. The tactility of the textile was not considered as I discouraged the audience from touching the banners by providing white gloves;
  10. The sensory appeal of textiles was inherent in the selection of the cloth, patterns and techniques that were used to present new messages to an audience who wanted to see a textile exhibition;
  11. The use of small text where it cannot be expected to be read and treat as 'texture' only;
  12. The designs should be in visual language and English;
  13. Avoiding the use of dense and small information; and
  14. The readable text on the banners should be no higher than 1350mm from the floor so the audience will look down on the information to read it.

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15 Refer to Definition of terms



At this time, I had not contemplated the notion of making the textile banners with the characteristics of water. The message and the audience response to the message over-rid this appreciation of materiality and capital. An opportunity missed!



**Figure 16:** *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles at The Sydney Quilt and Craft Show Darling Harbour June 2008. Photograph Alan Tremain*

### 8.5. Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles banners

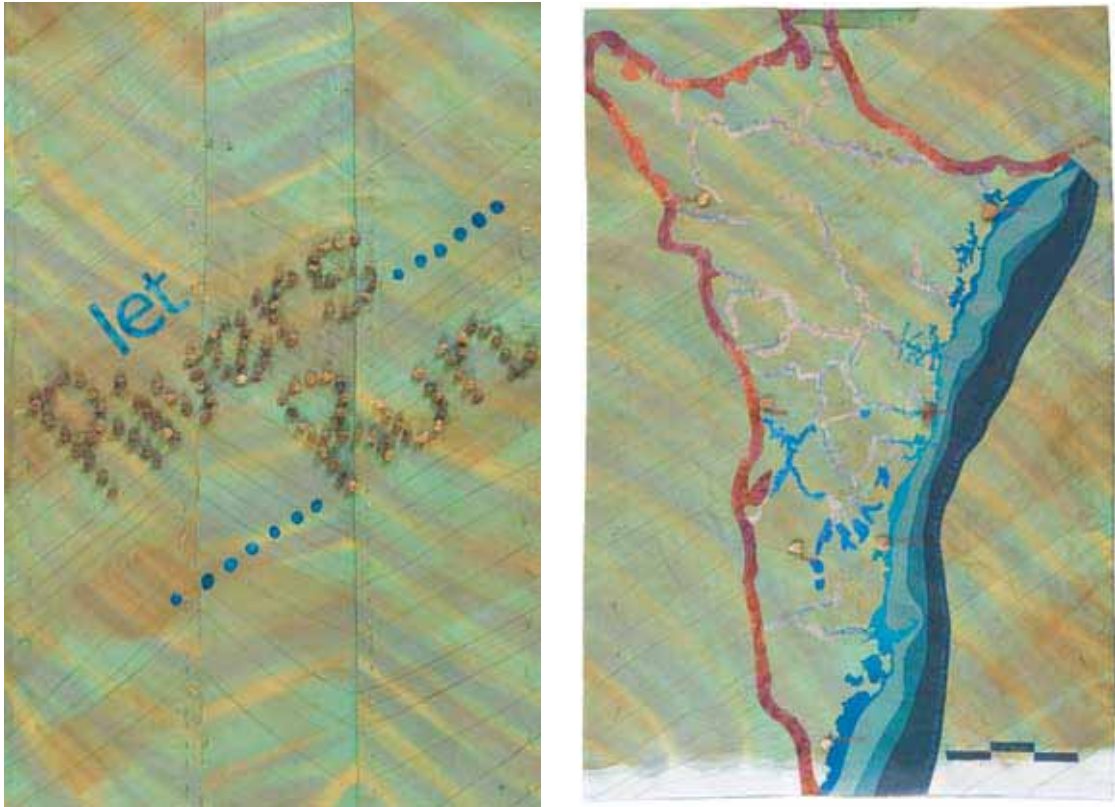


**Figure 17:** 'Recycle H2O' stitched textile banner showing caption side on left and information on right above.

Design subjects for 'Recycle H2O' included: water molecules and images, the water cycle and rotation, water more valuable than gold, fresh and salt water is recyclable, recycled textiles as a metaphor for water and water is blue gold. Dimensions 67cm wide x 172 cm high.

Materials used in 'Recycle H2O' included: recycled cotton and indigo garments, painted paper, 48 gifted pieces of textile representing water and commercial polyester thread.

Techniques used in 'Recycle H2O' included fused appliqué, hand appliqué, machine stitching and machine embroidery.



**Figure 18:** *'Let rivers run' stitched textile banner showing caption side on left and information on right above. Dimensions 72 cm wide x 109 cm high.*

Design subjects for 'Let rivers run' included: Sydney Basin river map, catchment areas and dams illustrated, a Hunter River photograph source, a Shoalhaven River photograph source (© Carolyn Sullivan), bores and farmers and river habitat environments. Dimensions 72 cm wide x 109 cm high.

Materials used in 'Let rivers run' included recycled rayon garment, commercial silk and voile, hand dyed cotton, river pebbles, linen thread.

Techniques used in 'Let rivers run' included shibori dyed cotton, fused appliqué, machine embroidery, machine stitching and hand stitching.





**Figure 19:** *'River is for fish' stitched textile banner showing caption side on left and information on right above.*

Design subjects for 'River is for fish' included: a map of river water, a drain is just for rain stencil, river provides accommodation for fish, river as dual landscape with layers of meaning, flooding is natural cleansing and the aeration of water is healthy. Dimension 72 cm wide x 149 cm high.

Materials for 'River is for fish' included recycled silk garment (1940), gifted silk, purchased hand-painted silk and silk thread.

Techniques for 'River is for fish' included hand painted silk, heat set text on silk, fused appliqué, machine embroidery and hand stitching.



**Figure 20: 'Who owns the water?'** Stitched textile banner caption side on left and information side right above.

Design subjects for 'Who owns the water?' included: water rights not tied to land ownership, government ownership of ground water in NSW, drinking water versus river water health, tank water collects more than catchments and aquifers, roof water ownership versus ground water in NSW and the water table. Dimensions 67 cm wide x 154 cm high.

Materials for 'Who owns the water?' included gifted recycled wool garment, gold paper, dyed silk, commercial linen cotton and silk and purchased marbled-silk.

Techniques for 'Who owns the water?' included heat set images and text on silk, shibori cotton, fused appliqué, machine embroidery, machine stitching and hand stitching.





**Figure 21:** *'We will drink it!'* stitched textile banner showing caption side left and information on right above.

Design subjects for 'We will drink it!' included purple tap is code for recycled water, the water cycle, illustration of the toilet to tap cycle, recycled sewage has problems, drinkable water is the result and guardia and virus are threats. Dimensions 74 cm wide x 102 cm high.

Materials used for 'We will drink it!' included recycled silk garment, commercial silk, commercial Japanese weaving, recycled cotton garment and dyed silk.

Techniques used for 'We will drink it!' included heat set text and images on silk and cotton, fused appliqué, woodblock print, machine stitching, machine embroidery and hand stitching.



**Figure 22: 'Reduce ocean outfalls'** stitched textile banner showing caption side on left and information on right above.

Design subjects for 'Reduce ocean outfalls' included: 450 billion litres discharged through outfalls each year, an image of tied tap suggests solution, the oceans inability to take up more, the ocean as a clean coast is preferred, a RMA grid of outfalls and impacts and oysters' inability to survive pollution. Dimensions 75 cm wide x 143 cm high.

Materials used for 'Reduce ocean outfalls' included recycled rayon garment, commercial silk, purchased hand-dyed silk, hand-dyed cotton and linen thread.

Techniques used for 'Reduce ocean outfalls' included heat set images on silk, fused appliqué, machine and hand stitching.



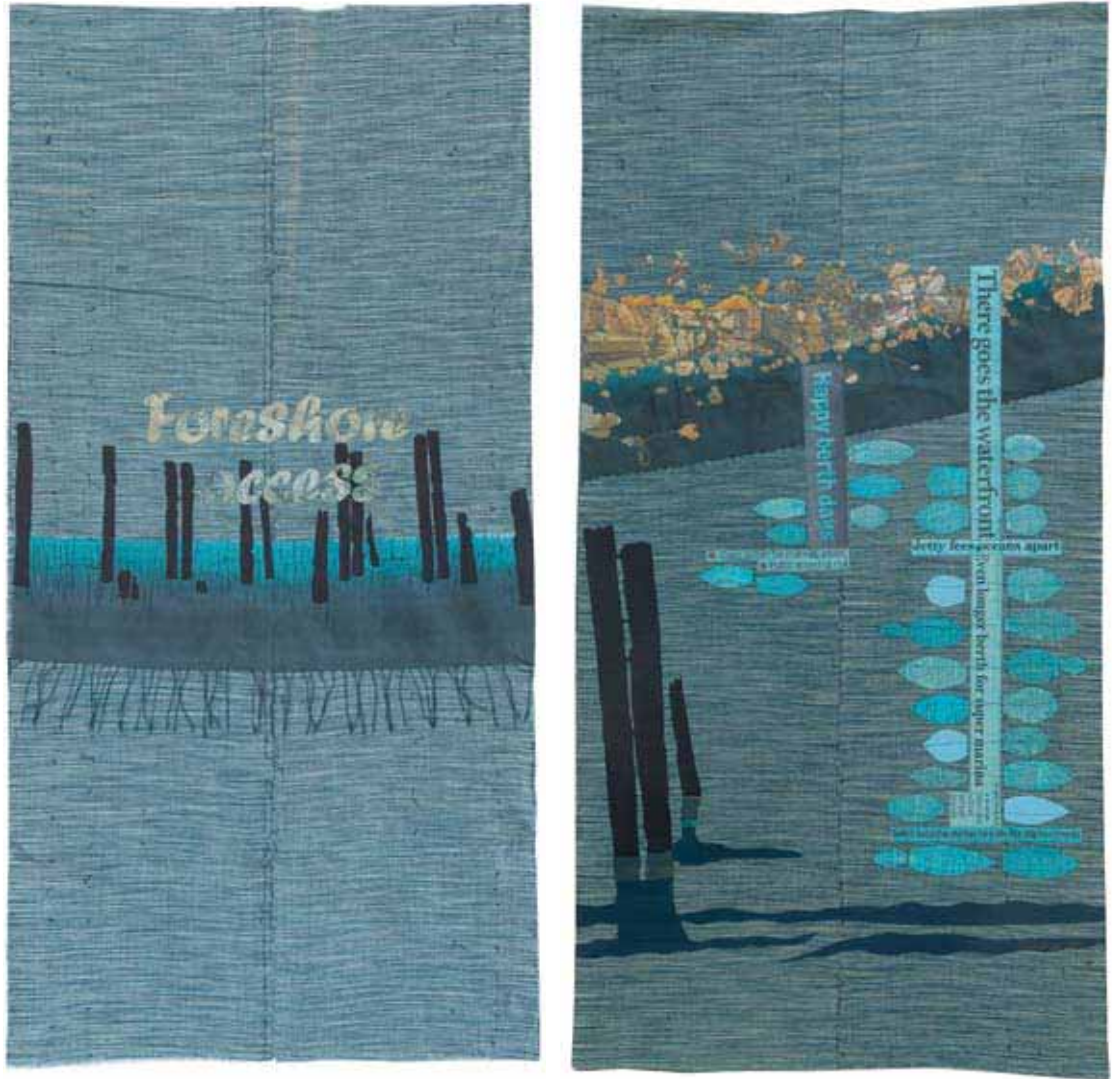
**Figure 23: 'Netting the coast'** stitched textile banner showing caption side left and information on right above.

Design subjects for 'Netting the coast' included nets to protect humans from sea creatures, nets trapping and endangering sea creatures, the fact that ghost nets are left behind by commercial fishermen, nets polluting the coastal areas, nets being a false risk avoidance and dolphins, turtles and sharks drowning in nets. Dimensions 72 cm wide x 92 cm high.

Materials used for 'Netting the coast' included recycled printed rayon garment, commercial cotton and silk lace, commercial polyester and metallic net, purchased hand-painted silk, commercial cotton and gifted shells and sponges.

Techniques used on 'Netting the coast' included heat set text on cotton, hand-painted silk, fused appliqué, machine and hand stitching





**Figure 24: 'Foreshore access'** stitched textile banner showing caption side left and information side right above.

Design subjects used for 'Foreshore access' included a harbour a car park for boats, shrinking public access to foreshore, the commercialisation of harbour for profit, an increased value of properties with private jetties, small boat owners being ousted for millionaires and changes to the Maritime Service Board rules for foreshore access. Dimensions 73 cm wide x 146 cm high.

Materials used in 'Foreshore access' included recycled silk garment, commercial silk, commercial shibori silk scarf, printed newspaper and commercial polyester thread.

Techniques used in 'Foreshore access' included over-painted paper fused to silk, heat set images on silk, fused appliqué and machine stitching.



**Figure 25: 'Pollutants affect the sea'** stitched textile banner showing caption side left and information side right above.

Design subjects used for 'Pollutants affect the sea' included the fact that fresh and salt water pollute each other, anoxic seas and algal blooms, industrial pollution dioxins affecting fish, plastic bags being a major polluter, oysters dying due to virus and the use scientific symbols. Dimensions 66cm wide x 155 cm high.

Materials used in 'Pollutants affect the sea' included recycled printed silk garment, commercial sateen and silk, commercial polyester thread and printed-paper.

Techniques used in 'Pollutants affect the sea' included heat set text on hand-dyed silk and cotton, hand-painted silk and cotton, fused appliqué and machine stitching.



**Figure 26:** *'Shipping'* stitched textile banner showing caption side left and information side right above.

Design subjects used for 'Shipping' were aquatic ecosystems of harbours and ports, the fact that barnacles can grow on anything, saltwater rusting metal, foreign marine species transported in ballast water, illustrating introduced marine species in Sydney Basin and oil spills and natural pollution. Dimensions 71 cm wide x 84 cm high.

Materials used in 'Shipping' included recycled shibori garment (1910) commercial silk, voile and cotton, textile paint, commercial polyester thread and gifted embroidery.

Techniques used in 'Shipping' included hand-painted silk, fused appliqué, heat set text on hand-dyed silk and machine stitching.





**Figure 27: 'Sea country'** stitched textile banner showing caption side left and information side right above.

Design subjects used for 'Sea country' included the fact that commercial licences are used to harvest from the sea, the ocean is for fish species, marine parks reduce access for fishermen, Aboriginal people have sea right laws, the existing conflicting custodians of the ocean in government, the existence of aboriginal people and recreational and commercial fishermen and sea as country. **Dimensions** 72 cm wide x 143 cm high.

Materials used for 'Sea country' included recycled silk sateen garment, recycled rayon, commercial shibori silk and marbled cotton, commercial cotton, commercial polyester thread and commercial hand-painted silk.

Techniques used for 'Sea country' included heat set text on silk and cotton, fused appliqué and machine stitching.



**Figure 28:** *'Desalination' stitched textile banner showing caption side left and information side right above.*

Design subjects used for 'Desalination' included the fact that Kurnell is a delicate and damaged environment, pipeline locations affects water habitats, osmosis forces water to desalt, the increased cost of water, and the released brine back into the sea affecting the environment and damage to marine ecosystem. **Dimensions** 72 cm wide x 150 cm high.

Materials used for 'Desalination' included recycled silk garment, commercial silk rayon and voile, purchased Japanese weaving, purchased hand-dyed silk, textile paint, commercial polyester thread and salt crystals.

Techniques used for 'Desalination' included heat set images on cotton, shibori redyed silk, fused appliqué felt tip pen handwriting, machine stitching and glued salt crystals.

## 8.6. Exhibition design and development

Kress and van Leeuwen discuss knowing the audience in terms of physical requirements or context. Using the questions formulated by Kress and van Leeuwen (Kress 1996), the following exhibition decisions were clarified:

- The audience will walk into, around and out of the exhibition in each location;
- At the same time the audience will write answers to the questions on the questionnaire document provided, while they are in attendance;
- The audience will want to read the textiles and the questionnaire document for information, value and learning;
- The audience may read the textile once, return to read it again and want to read both sides;
- The tendency for too dense information should be avoided; and
- Allow space and time between banners for audience digestion.

The layout and design of the exhibition was required to reinforce the following concepts:

1. Water in the environment is a continuous cycle through fresh and salt;
2. A circular layout will translate into a continuum; a lack of beginning or end and represent infinity, perfection and eternity,
3. Water is an environment, whether it is fresh or salt, and sustains more than humans;
4. The display mechanism should suggest the issues hang on human shoulders;
5. Recycled or recyclable water should be used as the basis for the display system;
6. The sequence of the stitched textile banners should reinforce the cycle from fresh to salt to fresh water and no single issue/banner is more important than another;
7. The display is lightweight and quickly able to be assembled and disassembled but safe from audience damage or harm;
8. The stitched textile banners are displayed with the title text on the outside of the circular layout and the detail of the issue is explained on the inside, suggesting an inner sanctum of precious information;
9. Sufficient space between the stitched textile banners will allow the audience to move into the centre of the display and discover more layers of meaning; and
10. The informative power of the 12 stitched textile banners as one exhibition was greater than the individual textile banners.

The final exhibition design was a six-metre circle or elliptical layout of pale blue 'potable' water tanks, laid on their side and filled with 20 litres of potable water supplied by the exhibition venue. The weight of the water tank at 20 litres rendered the tanks stable, not movable by accident, yet they will remain soft and moveable should they be kicked or tripped upon and consistent with the messages of the exhibition and banners.

Each water tank aligned to the twelve positions on a clock face and a natural bamboo t-section frame lashed to the tank adjacent to the handle with black bamboo fibre. The tanks faced the centre of the circular space and each displayed the name of the textile banner in small text.

The double-sided stitched textile banners hung on the horizontal component of the T-structure of bamboo in a manner similar to that used to display kimonos in many traditional exhibition displays. The totemic concept faced the audience.

The *Fresh and salt* exhibition, nominally filled a space ten metres by ten metres, required only a water supply for the potable water-tanks and adjustable or natural lighting to complete the installation.

The exhibition installation was adjusted at each of the three locations to suit the venue. In two of the locations, the building floor plan defined a flat oval, which retained the analogy to the water cycle that was available with the circular layout.

At the close of each *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles* exhibition, the supplier of the venue discharged and re-used the water from the potable water-tanks.

### 8.7. Conclusion

The *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles* exhibition and textile banners were developed to capture the topical issues of fresh and salt water in the Sydney Basin and gather audience response.

The design of the textile banners allowed me to voice the issues that I saw as important topical subjects from Sydney publications. The Sydney area audience responded to the 12 stitched textile banners.

Two respondents provided the following comments on textile techniques: “*While examining the (textile) techniques in which I am interested, the subject matter was reinforced*”; and “*I was fascinated with the application of material techniques created from unusual sources to illustrate subject matter, boats, poles and rock wall.*”





**Figure 29:** *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles exhibition at Kudos Gallery, College of Fine Arts UNSW in November 2008. Photograph: Andy Payne.*



**Figure 30:** *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles exhibition at Palm House, Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney in February 2009. Photograph: Andy Payne.*



## CHAPTER 9

## Fluidity and transparency

**9.1. Introduction**

Material production is comprised of the interrelated resources of surface, substance and the tools of production. So why use textiles to tell the tale of water? Why is the temporality of cloth appropriate?

As discussed in the research conclusion the studio development of *Fathoming* textiles would recontextualise the textiles for this enquiry. The discovery of 'imagetext' has offered new meaning to my textile designs. The ability to produce closely aligned image and text has been tantalising to the mind and the intellectual concept of textile design.

**9.2. Concept research and inspiration**

The challenge to produce a 'wet abstract,' that is, a textile that projects an idea about water in an abstract format, usually with 'imagetext,' has been coined as part of this enquiry.

The stitched textile banners used in the *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles* exhibitions were generally made of recycled cloth, opaque in structure, and densely woven. The hanging mechanism supporting the stitched textile banners allowed a fluidity and sway of the material that I had not expected. The audience acknowledged that the recycled cloth banners were both sustainable and environmentally aware but I felt the cloth did not have the fluidity and transparency, characteristic of water. This was an opportunity missed, to represent the water subject using textiles and to reflect on both materials' characteristics.

An early observation from a scholar at a postgraduate review in 2008 was that "*water cannot be confined so why have your textiles been finished at the edges?*" This comment led me to think further on how technique and process can be detrimental to the outcome and message, or conversely, can provide opportunities to enhance the message.

The Studio Practice provided the opportunity to reconsider the research and the meanings of water in the translation of information to the audience.

I was not surprised to find that through the audience analysis the temporality of the textiles matched the temporality of the material, water, the metaphor, in their responses.

### 9.3. New meanings and codes

The studio research has used the production of the *Fathoming* textiles as an opportunity to develop the layers of meaning and to represent the fragility of the natural environment, as both revealed and connected ideas.

These layering of the textile designs, suggest cultural, individual and physical connections and show water in a new context as fluid and transparent.

By using the traces of paint-filled water to suggest cartographical lines, mapping of place adds to the visual language. The politics of the situation and the rhetorical combination of understood context and proper timing are always serendipitous and I felt the time was right now. For me the *Fathoming* textiles had to be a unique metaphor for water, reflect the politics of the message and show that the materiality of how the textile had enhanced the message. The Australian Aboriginal concept of custodianship of the relationship to water is a preferred paradigm to the Western concept of ownership and 'open access' for all. The Western attitude has no customary guardianship of the material and is only interested in the harvest of products for commercial gain (Sharp 2002).

The use of double-sided textiles with transparency and fluidity has set some challenges. Front and back are no longer separate identities but also offer the reverse side to represent the information.

### 9.4. Materials and techniques

An exploration of cloth that provided the fluidity, transparency or translucency that was required as a base cloth was resolved with the use of silk organza. The cloth has the strength in a single piece of material, is able to take dye, paint and heat applied to the surface and has a lustre and translucency not available in other fabrics.

A number of techniques and applied finishes which were used to experiment on the organza textiles include: rust dye, silk dye, paint, crayon and paint drawing, fused appliqué, hand appliqué, applied mixed media, machine stitching, hand stitching, heat set images and text and hand-painting. Some of these techniques are new to me and are described under skills developed in section 9.5 *Technical skills*.

### 9.5. Technical skills

In the process of researching, experimenting and developing the metaphorical potential of my textiles to suggest water for the assessment exhibition and the making of the *Fresh and salt* banners for the audience enquiry, I explored a range of techniques as part of my practice based research. I have documented the experimental processes and my technical skill development in chronological order, using the images that follow.



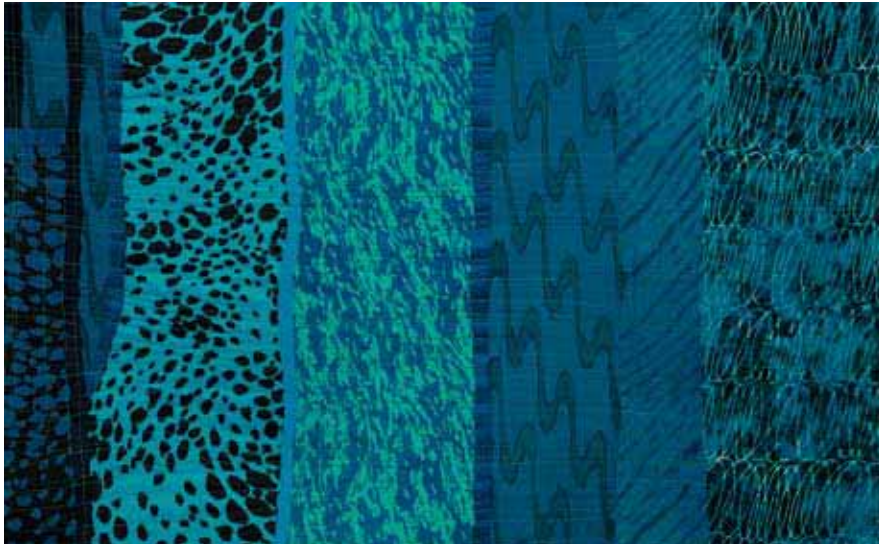
**Figure 31: detail 'Water currency' 2006.**

The detail of 'Water currency' shows my signature style of organza applied to the rear of the organza yardage and many Sydney Water printed reports sliced and fused to the front to represent rain. The applied gold-coined paper suggests an unrealistic attitude from the government in regards to this precious resource. This textile was a development of 'Medium is the message' and showed the early intuitive use of a translucent base textile, without my recognition of its inherent water characteristics.



**Figure 32: Detail painted textile 'Watermarks 2' 2006.**

Using contact paper instead of the silk textiles of my 'signature style', I was able to apply fabric paint in layers onto a variegated base cloth in order to represent the shimmering quality of water. The final work made in 2009 included an over layer of polyester organza, stitched and cut away in the same way as 'Not potable,' below at Figure 34.



**Figure 33: detail 'Watermarks' 2007.**

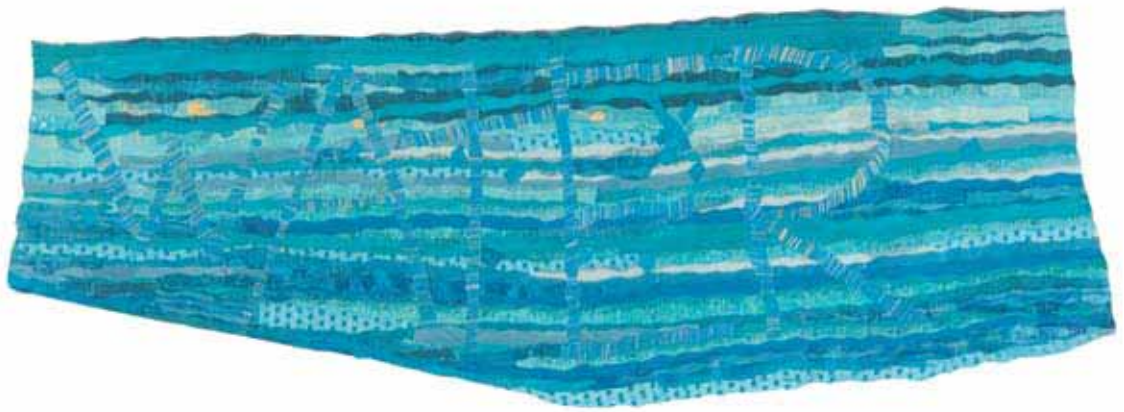
The commercial and recycled cloth was overdyed and overprinted, spliced together and stitched using variegated thread making lines, inspired by Dorothy Napangardi's linework in 'Salt on Mina Mina' 2001 (Napangardi 2002: p. 10). At this time, 'Watermarks' contained an edge of biased binding.



**Figure 34: 'Not potable' 40cm x 40cm 2007.**

The images of the 'Not potable' tap (Blackcoffee 2006), were heat set onto the cotton backing cloth. Torn strips of silk and polyester voile over-laid the entire surface under a layer of netting and machine quilting stitches held the layers in place. Layers of net and voile were cut away to expose the tap images and the text was programmed into the sewing machine and applied in lines and the title. Additional machine stitched line work, suggesting water bubbles, fill the spaces around the tap and in layers across the textile. For the first time this experimental work shows unbound edges which have been cut, squared and machine-stitched to within 3mm of the edge.





**Figure 35:** *'Water'* 33cm high x 96cm wide.

'Water' was an experiment to develop a piece of 'imagetext' (Mitchell 1994) in 2007. With scraps of silk cut in my 'signature-style' the pieces were fused using vliesofix onto a backing cloth and the same pieces used to make the text overlay. Hand stitching embroiders the text in gold thread. The cut edge has an irregular rippled line.



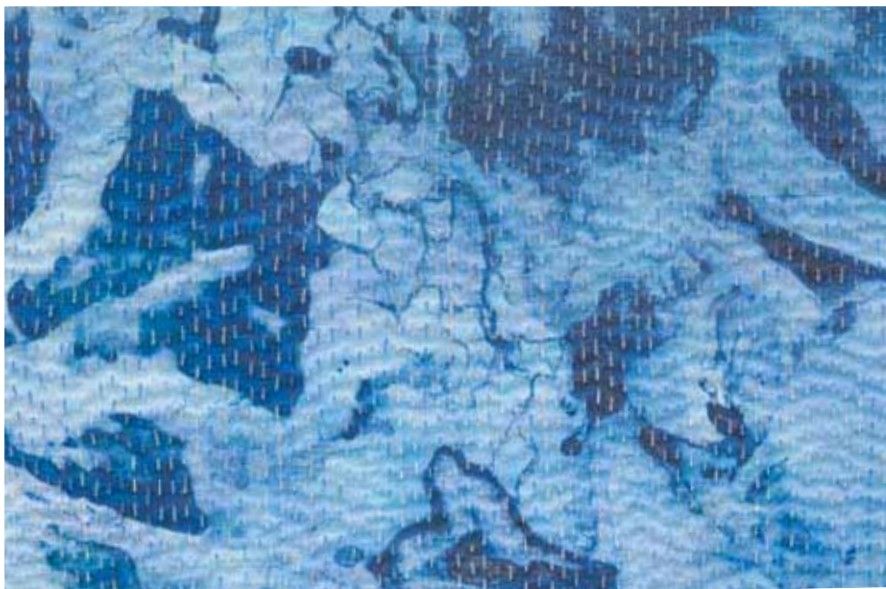
**Figure 36:** *'Rock' detail from 'Foreshore access' banner 2008.*

By fusing newspaper images to a backing cloth and applying a layer of 'Aquadhere' to the surface, the images retain a cloth characteristic, and because of this, are able to be used as other images as they do not degrade at the same rate as newspaper print. The rocks at the waters edge of the banner 'Foreshore access' used this technique as detailed above.



**Figure 37: 'Sea change 3' 30cm x 30cm 2008.**

A piece of knitted paint splattered cloth is the background material. The cut-away organza pieces from 'Watermarks 2' have been fused and combined with both hand stitching and machine stitched text, to create this experimental piece. The machine-stitched text forms the edge stitching for the work.



**Figure 38: detail 'A conversation with rain' 2008.**

Paint in a box technique and hand stitched embroidery thread has been used for this experimental textile.

In a workshop with Joan Schulze in 2008, we learnt to 'paint in a box'. The technique applies fabric paint to textile with a plastic sheet lined box that contains layers of cloth/textiles/paper. By dribbling the mixed paint colours over the contents of the box,

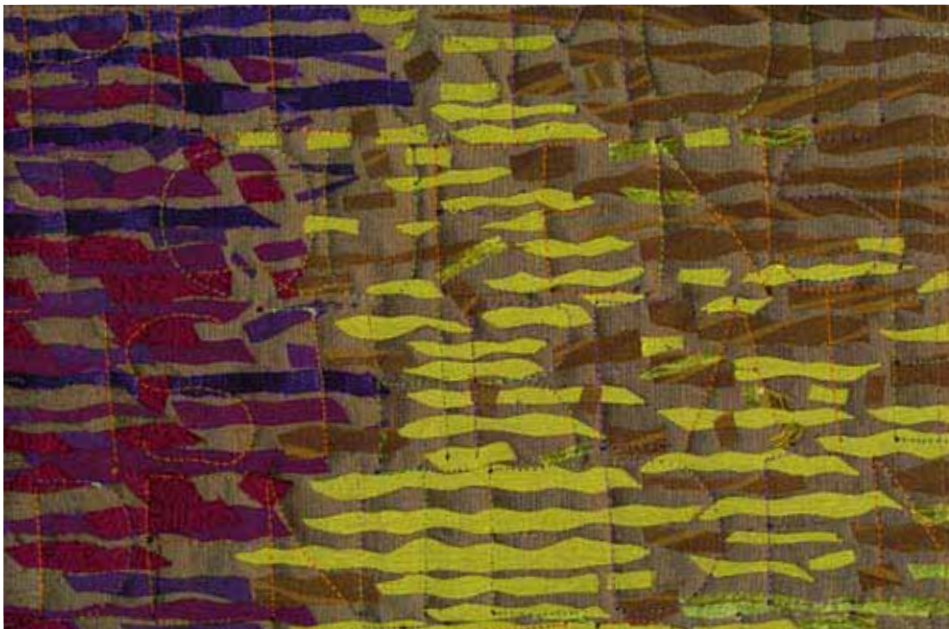


the paint seeps through the layers. How the cloth/textiles/paper is folded/stitched/gathered and how the paint moves through the layers in the box develops the design through the paint traces that remain on the cloth. The plastic sheet that lines the box also provides painted images usable for scanning.



**Figure 39: Experiment 'Paint in a box' 1. 2008.**

By scanning the paint which remained left on the plastic lining sheet and printing on textile, the scan can be used, as in a later experiment 'Oil spill'.



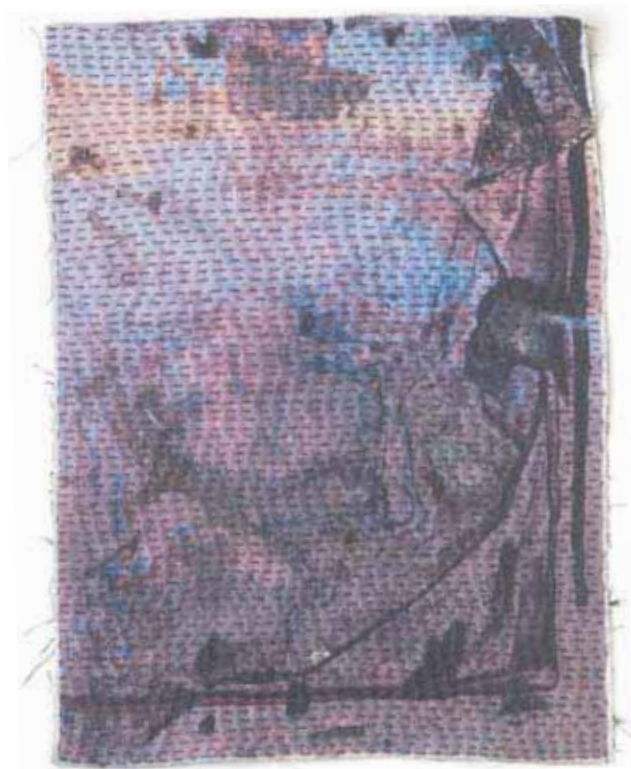
**Figure 40: Detail 'Brisbane 1' 2009**

Experimenting with 50mm high text covering the signature style textile 'Brisbane 1' rather than machine stitching lines has added layers of meaning and information to the work.



**Figure 41:** *Reverse side of 'Oil spill' 2009.*

The backing cloth is metallic silk hand stitched from the front. It has developed an image of mud or sand ripples left behind as the tide withdraws. This sample influenced development of the textile 'Outfalls' as part of studio work in 2010.



**Figure 42:** *'Oil spill' 30cm high x 20cm wide, 2009.*

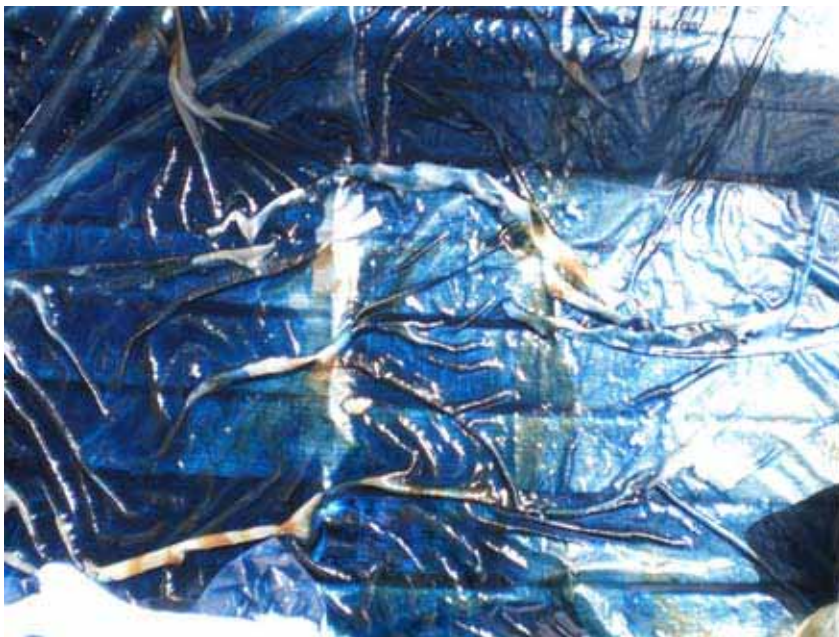
Experiment using a scanned plastic sheet image overlaid on scanned newspaper image printed on silk and hand stitched with embroidery thread.





**Figure 43:** *Experiment 'Paint in a box' 2, 2009. 60cm high x 45cm wide*

Machine stitched and gathered silk jacquard cloth, which was 'painted in a box'.



**Figure 44:** *Whole cloth dyeing 2010.*

Dyeing of whole cloth was another technique I had not attempted prior to this project and it has become very versatile in the watery and layered affects it has produced. With the textile arranged on a large sheet of plastic it is held in place to allow the application of mixed and coloured silk dye. The drying process accelerated when using the natural light from the sun and black plastic. The resulting swathes of watery landscape eventually revealed themselves.

Other techniques that I had not used previously included crayon on textile that delivered a coloured line, reflected the texture of the textile and added another level of detail.

With the fineness of the silk organza base cloth, the ability to machine stitch onto and retain a straight line (or close to), was made easier with the use of 'Tear away'. 'Tear away' is a matt unstructured cloth that tears away from the stitching once the needle and thread pierce it.

For me, the development of further and varied technical skills have additionally allowed the messages to define the techniques used, in order to deliver them in my textile work.

### **9.6. Conclusion**

The journey from the quilted messages such as 'not potable' to 'fathoming' textiles for this project, has allowed me to once again relinquish some of the textile rules. By thinking and imagining that the textiles are actually water, the 'wet abstract' and the materiality of the medium developed some of the characteristics of water. These characteristics have enabled the main message to be delivered much more powerfully to the audience.

## CHAPTER 10

# Fathoming

### 10.1. Introduction

With the proposition confirmed, the results of audience responses to the stitched textile banners, exhibited as part of *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles* led to the development of new textiles for assessment and exhibition.

The Studio Practice, a major component of this research, has incorporated lessons learnt from the research and a theoretical framework to improve the design of the water subjects and deliver a set of textiles for scholarly assessment— *Fathoming the depths: informative textiles*.<sup>16</sup>

### 10.2. Idea of fathoming

The studio work for the design and development of textiles for the *Fathoming the depths; informative textiles* exhibition utilised the analysis of design information value from the questionnaires in order to redesign and reproduce the five design subjects that had the least response from the audience of the exhibition *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles*.<sup>17</sup>

From the list of subjects that respondents would least like to discuss in Chapter 4, the five design subjects I have chosen to represent are:

1. 'Shipping' and 'ballast water infestation'
2. 'Sea country' as defined by Aboriginal people and Australians
3. 'Rivers for fish' the fragile habitat that is man's water supply
4. 'Desalination' and
5. 'Reduce ocean outfalls' dealing with discharge into the sea.

Why did these five designs have a low rate of recognition with the audience?

The analysis of the respondent's questionnaires identified that these designs either did not appeal to the audience, were a subject the respondents knew little about and did not

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<sup>16</sup> Fathoming means 'to sound the depth of; to penetrate, measure, and comprehend; to get to the bottom of.' As defined by the Webster dictionary.

<sup>17</sup> Appendix A: DVD of Exhibitions 1, 2 and 3

wish to learn more. Either the subject that was not within the respondent's worldview or was a subject that the respondents did not care about or want to respond to as part of the cycle of water. These five design subjects registered less than six per cent each and only 20 per cent of the whole audience response: an unfathomable conclusion!

### 10.3. Relationship of studio to research

The Studio Practice is a direct response to and development from the research of Part 1.

The proposition repeated in the introduction to Chapter 8, applied to the Studio Practice and development of textiles for the *Fathoming the depths: informative textiles* exhibition.

Reference to the methodology in the Introduction and the use of published information for the stitched textile banners and exhibition design for audience analysis, was reused for the studio research. The Studio Practice incorporated the lessons learnt from the case study interviews.

The development of the *Fathoming* textile used the same research format as the historic and contemporary textile samples in Part 1. This format included the type of image, the function of the image, the meaning of the composition and the modality markers, including tactility and sensory engagement. In the original assessment for example, in order to illustrate the impacts from the research, the textile banner 'Shipping' can be compared and contrasted with 'Ballast'. Specific textiles from Chapters 2 and 3 have influenced the development of the *Fathoming* textile designs and the impact on the textiles in 10.4 *Referencing the Literature Review*, shown later in this chapter.

For example, Susan Shies' hand-written text on 'Katrina blues' has influenced the design and type of 'imagetext' used for 'Outfalls' as part of the *Fathoming the depths: informative textiles* exhibition.

The results of the questionnaire analysis that concentrated on the textile banner subjects, defined what subjects would be included in the *Fathoming* textiles: the feedback based on the qualitative comments, the responses to the exhibition design, materials and techniques are all incorporated.

Learning from the many qualitative comments on the design ideas presented in the *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles* exhibitions, the following distillation of content integrated into the design ideas for the *Fathoming* textiles, differs from the questionnaire banners:

- the use of information design/visual narrative/messages;
- inclusion of 'imagetext' and mapping;
- the use political subject or political significance;
- being colourful and emotive;
- including scientific and researched details;

- including recycled and gifted textiles;
- providing many layers of meaning; and
- allowing the textile tradition to speak.

In addition, I have also added:

- showing development from the designs exhibited in response to audience data.

At the beginning of this research, I revealed the concept of multi-layered textiles that have the ability to expose the embedded, mapped layers of culture, context and a unique form of rhetoric. The studio research allowed the design development of *Fathoming* textiles to explore this expression further in Chapter 9: '*Fluidity and transparency*'.

#### 10.4. Referencing the literature review and other artists

The five textiles for the *Fathoming the depths: informative textiles* exhibition, have been directly referenced by the Literature Review in Chapters 2 and 3 of this document and the other artists noted. The way that influence has affected the textile design includes<sup>18</sup>:

- 'Ballast' (Shipping) referenced the 'Bayeau tapestry' in the same format by showing the bulk of the information in the centre of the panel, with the text explaining the occurrence near the top and a border top and bottom providing further explanatory details. Judy Watson's sense of water place engaged me during the making process.
- 'Outfalls' (Reduce ocean outfalls) referenced Susan Shies' work 'Katrina Blues,' where the hand written text covering the work provides information and another perspective.
- 'Sea as country' (Sea country) referenced the work of Beth Hatton 'Selection #1– sheep,' (second Series) through the use of text for both sides of the argument about the difference between Aboriginal and non-indigenous Australian's attitude to the sea, placed on both sides of the translucent material.
- 'It's delicious' (Desalination) referenced The Australian Natives Association banner for the heraldry and text, Fanny B. Shaw's 'Prosperity Quilt' for its humour and text in each square, and the Changi quilt for the grid background
- 'Riverland' (Rivers for fish) referenced Linda Gass' work using aerial landscapes and brightly coloured images of the impact of human development. Dorothy Napangardi's mapping of place influenced the design and stitching of the organza overlayer of information. The detailing of the depths of fathoms and contours of water depth using embroidered text, adds information.

The process for the development and completion of these textile designs follows.

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18 Listed is the title of the *Fathoming* textile with the name of the stitched textile banner in brackets.

### 10.5. Design process and scrolls

The design development of the *Fathoming* textiles has used a consistent process as defined below:

1. Listing the six design subjects used for the stitched textile banner designs from the topical publications 2006–2008.
2. Showing an illustration of both sides of the relevant stitched textile banner made for the *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles* exhibition.
3. Listing the results of the audience reaction to the design subjects and information provided in the qualitative analysis.
4. Responding to the audience reaction and qualitative information on the design subjects and confirm the design criteria for the *Fathoming* textiles.
5. Designing the textiles and the exhibition *Fathoming the depths: informative textiles* after due consideration of the components affecting the designs.
6. Comparing and contrasting the stitched textile banner design with the *Fathoming* textile design by using the standard research format developed.
7. Reviewing the impact of information value and theoretical framework from the stitched textile banners audience analysis and define how that will influence the *Fathoming* textile designs.
8. Documenting the development of detailed designs and production of the textiles by using a scroll format and displayed at the exhibition: *Fathoming the depths: informative textiles*.

The definition of techniques for each *Fathoming* textile design is included on the scrolls and documented in 10.7.

### 10.6. Design outcomes

The size and shape of the textiles has changed from the stitched textile banners made for the audience enquiry.

The *Fathoming* textiles are 1.05 metres wide x 3.0 metres high and designed to hang as a 'long cloth' to give the audience the sense that the water issue is large and important. The shape of the textile is rectangular in order to reflect the impact of humans and intentionally larger than human scale.

The stitching used on the *Fathoming* textiles is both hand and machine applied. For the 'Outfall' textile displayed on a horizontal surface just above the floor, the hand stitching simulates the soft ripple of water and the Thai silk imitates the gloss and lustre of water. The hand stitching applied from the reverse side offers a more subtle line as the ripple effect on the topside.

The colours used for *Fathoming the depths: informative textiles* are a mixture of clear colour and muted colour but the range is repeated across the set of five textiles and intertwines between them when seen in the exhibition layout.

The information on materials and textile techniques used for the *Fathoming* textiles is with the textile images, 10.7.

Images of the scrolls used to document the production of the *Fathoming* textiles is evident in the DVD in Appendix B.

### 10.7. *Fathoming the depths: informative textiles and the long cloth textiles*



**Figure 45: 'Ballast'**

Stitched textile banner design from *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles* exhibition was 'Shipping'. Dimensions 105cm wide x 290cm high.

Design subjects used for 'Ballast' included bio-invaders in ballast water, which were overtaking existing native species; pollutes saltwater causing rust, bio-invaders damaging structures, scientific details showing images of microorganisms such as diatoms and plankton (© Dr Martina Doblin) and the politics of the transparency of regulations on ballast water exchange.

The information value of the Bayeux tapestry has influenced the design of this textile.

Materials used on 'Ballast' included silk organza, crayon, rust, linen thread and commercial polyester thread.

Techniques used on 'Ballast' included rust stained, silk dyed, hand-painted, bleach resist line-work, heat set images, hand stitching and machine embroidery.





**Figure 46: 'Sea as country'**

Stitched textile banner design from *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles* exhibition was 'Sea country'. Dimensions 105cm wide x 290cm high.

Design subjects for 'Sea as country' included a direct attitudinal comparison between the Aboriginal people's custodianship and spiritual sustenance with the Western concept of ownership and open access for commercial gain.

The information value of Beth Hatton's 'Selection #1—sheep' has influenced the design of 'Sea as country'.

Materials used in 'Sea as country' included silk organza, commercial Thai silk, silk cloth, recycled cotton shirting, hand-dyed silk and hand-painted silk.

Techniques used in 'Sea as country' included heat set text on silk organza, fused appliqué, paint in a box and hand stitching.



**Figure 47: 'Outfalls'**

Stitched textile banner design from *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles* exhibition was 'Reduce ocean outfalls'. Dimensions of free-form shape: 126cm x 107cm.

Design subjects used in 'Outfalls' included outfalls discharged into the sea, discolouration of the clear saltwater, the politics of saltwater being clean and clear for swimmers, text in line-work to emphasise contours of water and the use of 'imagetext'. The information value of Susan Shie's 'Katrina Blues' quilt influenced the design of the textile.

Materials used in 'Outfalls' included commercial Thai silk, pentel pen, polyester wadding and cotton quilting thread.

Techniques used on 'Outfalls' included hand-writing, hand quilting from underside and hand stitching on topside edge.



**Figure 48: 'It's delicious'**

Stitched textile banner design from *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles* exhibition was 'Desalination'. Dimensions 107 cm wide x 300 cm high.

Design subjects used in 'It's delicious' include: desalinated water proposed to top up the current water supply, the expensive osmosis process, listing suburbs who receive desalinated water, the quality of Sydney water using crystal analysis and the NSW government using plaques as publicity. The last subject was inspired when the NSW government presented desalinated water to the people of Sydney and Premier Keneally famously stated of desalinated water that "It's delicious".

The Australian Native Association banner, Fanny B. Shaw's 'Prosperity quilt' and the 'Changi quilt' influenced the design and information value of this textile.

Materials used in 'It's delicious' included silk organza, commercial silk satin, voile, pentel pen and crayon.

Techniques used in 'It's delicious' included heat set images on organza, fused appliqué, solvy stitched structure (desal water) and machine stitching.



**Figure 49: 'Riverland'**

Stitched textile banner design from *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles* exhibition was 'River is for fish'. Dimensions 108 cm wide x 300 cm high.

Design subjects for 'Riverland' included: rivers being a many-layered landscape, river contours as fathoms, plants and fish being the inhabitants of the river as 'land', the natural eucalyptus landscape polluting and discolouring the fresh water, and the impact of human development on the riverland. Linda Gass' textile designs influenced the design of 'Riverland' in terms of information value of landscape and colour.

Materials used in 'Riverland' included gifted painted silk georgette, silk organza, silk dye and commercial polyester thread.

Techniques used in 'Riverland' included hand-painted silk, bleach resist line-work, heat set images and machine embroidery and stitching.



### 10.8. The exhibition: *Fathoming the depths: informative textiles*

The exhibition design developed after the banner designs. It defined a closed space created by the four hanging textiles and presented a pool of water in the middle. The textiles presented fluidity, transparency and mapping of layers of meaning in the context of the textile's ability to present messages about the politics of water.

The concept for the *Fathoming the depths: informative textiles* exhibition design was to deliver information on a number of levels: through detail, emotionally, showing the big picture, using humour and mapping the many layers of water's stratum. The exhibition concept is an environmental response to the question of supply and demand.

The scrolls hung on one wall of the Gallery and exhibited the process of making the textiles, adding to the information and my voice.



**Figure 50:** *Fathoming the depths: informative textiles* exhibition COFASpace 2010.

### 10.9. Conclusion

'Fathoming', as defined by the *Webster Dictionary*, is to penetrate, measure, and comprehend—to 'get to the bottom of' the issue. This chapter has looked at the design subjects for the textiles, the relationship of the textile design to the academic research and the process used to design and document the making of the textile and exhibition for assessment: *Fathoming the depths: informative textiles*.<sup>19</sup>

The *Reflective conclusion: watermarks!* in Chapter 11 summarises the studio research as part of the Master of Design (Hons) by research postgraduate degree.

<sup>19</sup> Appendix B: *Fathoming the depths: informative textiles* exhibition DVD.

## CHAPTER 11

## Reflective conclusion: watermarks!

**11.1. Introduction**

When Liz Williamson suggested the prospect of studying a Master of Design (Hons) by research, at the College of Fine Arts University of NSW, it was an ideal opportunity. The time and resources were available to research and disclose whether other designers were using textiles to express messages, be part of an academic textiles' community whose work was valued and to shift my textile design work onto another plane: the undisclosed passions of the process.

**11.2. Lessons learnt**

The Conclusion in Part 1 refers to the results of the research component of this project and does not identify the lessons learnt from a practice perspective. I have learnt a number of lessons across various areas of the research and Studio Practice. These lessons include the case study interviews, the research reading, the unexpected responses from the exhibition audiences, the studio technique and materials research.

From the case study interviews with practitioners, a number of 'light bulb moments' have affected my attitude, approach and techniques for the studio textile work.

Linda Gass, a textile artist practising in San Francisco who makes art quilts about the San Francisco Bay area and its water problems, has always used photographs, aerial views, maps, illustrative historical maps, topographic and highway maps to inform her work. Linda stated during the interview with me that she always does a lot of reading from books, online and in magazines to collect information prior to starting a new textile. This level of research was very enlightening and has become a technique I have used since, and will continue to use for future textiles.

Jennifer Turpin, an Australian sculptor, makes work that orchestrates water to express movement and form, so that it is in a constant state of change. With an appropriate textile base-cloth, the textiles for the *Fathoming the depths: informative textiles* exhibition have realised the notion of movement and added this characteristic to the many layers of meaning presented in the textiles I have created.

From my point of view, the importance of water and the passion for the subject has not abated through this research and studio project. In fact, they have increased, and as Jennifer Turpin previously explained, the textiles produced for this enquiry are for the 'big world'.

Professor Amanda Lawson, an experienced arts administrator and manager with a background in cultural enterprise development and management of craft centres, advised that audience *"Respondents see an exhibition as an informal learning environment so are able to say they have learnt something they did not know before"*.

This new concept to me was enlightening and made the use of the questionnaire at the exhibitions *Fresh and salt: messages in stitched textiles* even more powerful.

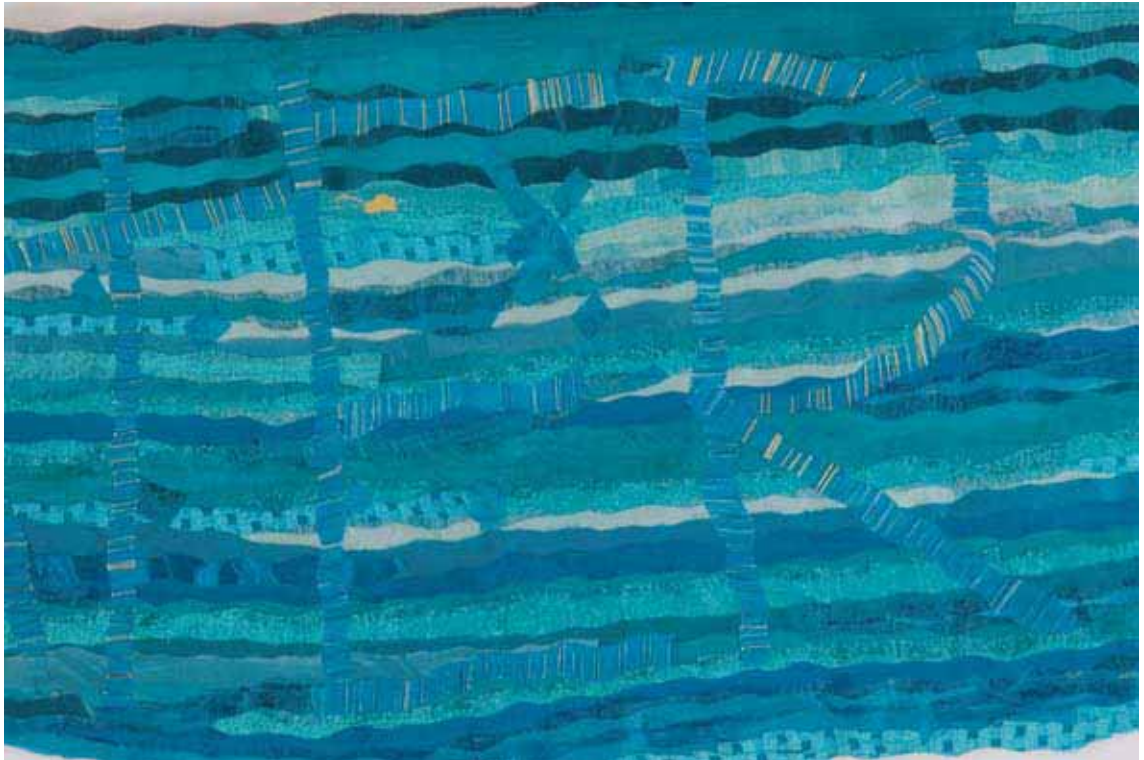
From reading the theoretical framework upon the discovery of W.J.T. Mitchell, and the literature on 'picture theory' using the 'metapicture' and 'imagetext,' this research in my mind has provided a philosophical rigor to the context and design approach that has transcended postmodernism.

From reading and understanding the interlinking of consideration for the site of the production of the textile work, the mind of the viewer and the site of the viewing of the textile, I now have a clear view of how these components have a major role in how the message is delivered and received. Further development of these tools follows.

From the questionnaire responses the comments on the use of techniques, materials, the approach to text and ways to get the information out to a wider audience were an unexpected outcome. Some of the comments below will continue to impact on my textile designs into the future:

- To be too preaching and 'in your face' with the issues at hand;
- The audience is intelligent and the message does not need to be delivered in minute detail or in a blatant manner;
- The textile banners challenge the social construct regarding textile's identity and position in some of the respondent's minds;
- There is value in presenting an individual's passions to an audience;
- Textiles may not be every-one's medium but they are a blank canvas that can be used more extensively than they are currently;
- Valuable criticism concerning the use of the textile banners include the question 'why is textile any better than a poster?'; and
- The audience voice has validated the textiles in comments such as *"the materials are part of the message"* that *"the textiles enrich each other"*, and that *"different techniques get the message across."*





**Figure 51: Detail of 'Water' a piece of imagetext**

### 11.3. Final word

This research and Studio Practice Master of Design (Hons) has allowed me to confirm that textiles are the correct medium for me to continue to use in order to express issues about water.

The exhibition format is the correct location in which to show my textiles.

Messages on textiles are valued and respected in the twenty-first century, where images are purported to 'speak louder than words'.

Many other textile designers and practitioners are ready to use their medium to have a voice in the world. Welcome to the materiality of textiles and the messages in the medium!

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