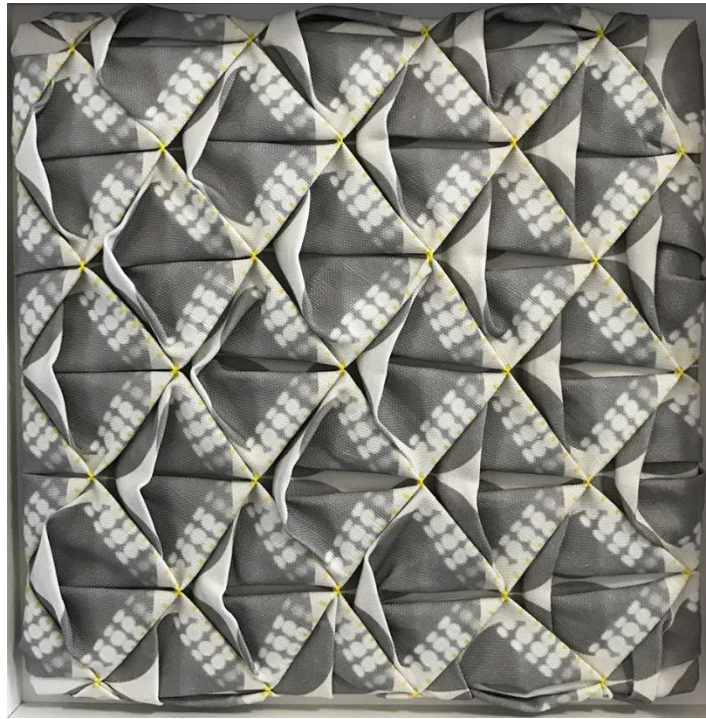


Friends of York Art Gallery

Q and A: A series where artists answer questions about their practice
in dialogue with Judith Glover

8.

Ealish Wilson, textiles artist



Ealish Wilson, Scales

Can you describe your artistic practice?

I design and create manipulated sculptural textiles through print, stitch and multiple-surface manipulations. My work is rooted in traditional skills like pleating, smocking and printing. I use technology such as digital printing to complement these techniques.



Lava Flow (2019), digital print on linen, selected for Vlieseline Textile Art Prize 2020

What started you off as an artist?

Creativity started at home, making clothes, home furnishings, knitting and embroidery. My secondary school, Ballakermeen High School, Douglas, on the Isle of Man, was a very artistic place; I spent lots of time in the art rooms. I have always loved making things. At Chester College I was taught by an inspiring tutor, Maxine Bristow; she started me off on my textiles art journey, changing my perception of textiles as an art form. I was able to explore a variety of techniques and new materials (to me) during this time: porcelain, different cloths, paper types, and using textiles alongside these materials.

Who or what are your influences?

I have three main areas of influence: architecture, travel, materials.

Architecture: I find architecture amazing for creating composition. Observing how an architect uses different materials and the proportions of each on a building is a great tool for me.

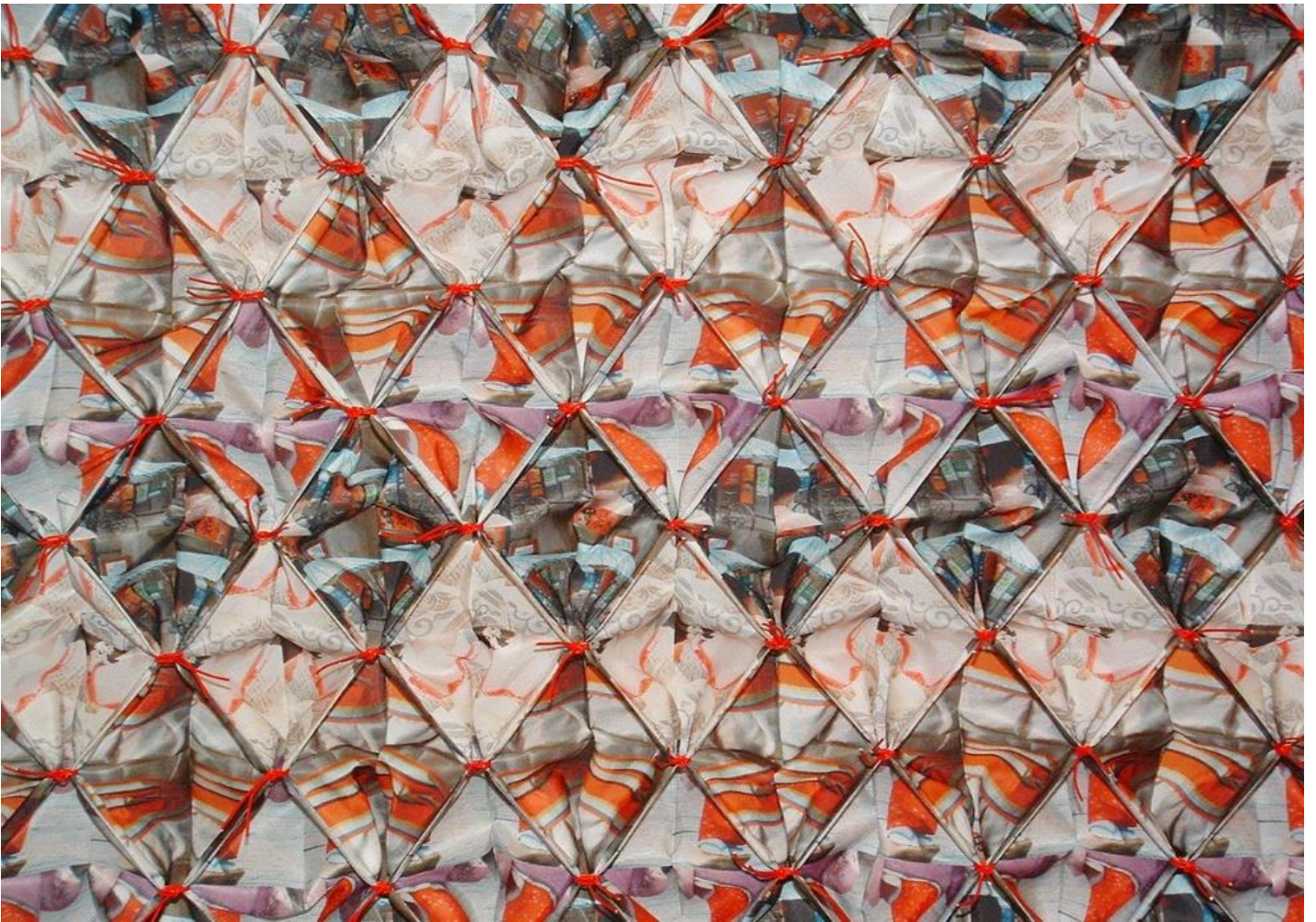


I will often look at a building and wonder how I can recreate it in textiles. In fact my smocking journey started after seeing the Prada building in Tokyo by Architects Herzog de Muron (see image left).

Here the use of materials is exceptional; the glass is convex and concave, creating soft forms held in diamond-shaped frames. I explored the form of this concept in textiles and developed a smocking technique that allowed me to put form at the centre of my work.

Travel: I have been lucky to have travelled much of my life. First with my family and later, newly married, moving to the States where I lived until 2019, when we moved to York. I am always intrigued by a new place: how architecture shapes the design of streets, creating new colors with light and shadow, the variety and uniqueness of clothing, how items are combined to create a visual feast for inspiration. Even a road surface can provide me with inspiration.

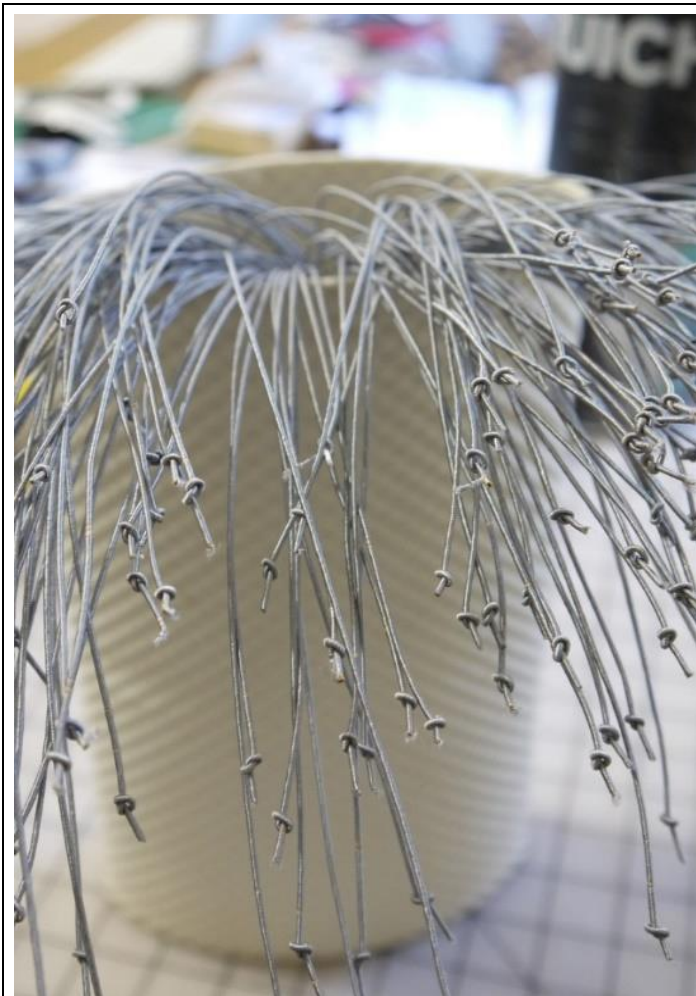
In 2003 I was involved in a project called [Through the Surface](#) where British textiles artists went to Japan to be mentored by Japanese textiles artists. I lived and worked with Michiko Kawarabayashi who taught me about seeing the art in the everyday, a plate, a flower. I was amazed on a daily basis by the incredible diligence of making, the idea of repeating, the meditation of repetition to create a large-scale work with complete focus on an idea. I am heavily influenced by Japanese sensibilities within textile art – the use of materials and process is always experimental but considered, paring back, starting with the material to see what happens.



Kimono Sublimation, print on sailcloth smocked with Mizuhiki strings (2004)

Materials:

I was introduced to the Mizuhiki string – Japanese washi paper string traditionally used for cards and wrapping – by Michiko Kawarabayashi. This was one of our collaborative materials for the ‘Through The Surface’ project, as in the two images below. I use them to create texture and add line in my work, almost as if they are drawn lines. This becomes particularly relevant when I photograph my work to create new textile designs.





I enjoy the idea of looking at a substrate and wondering about repurposing something from its intended use.

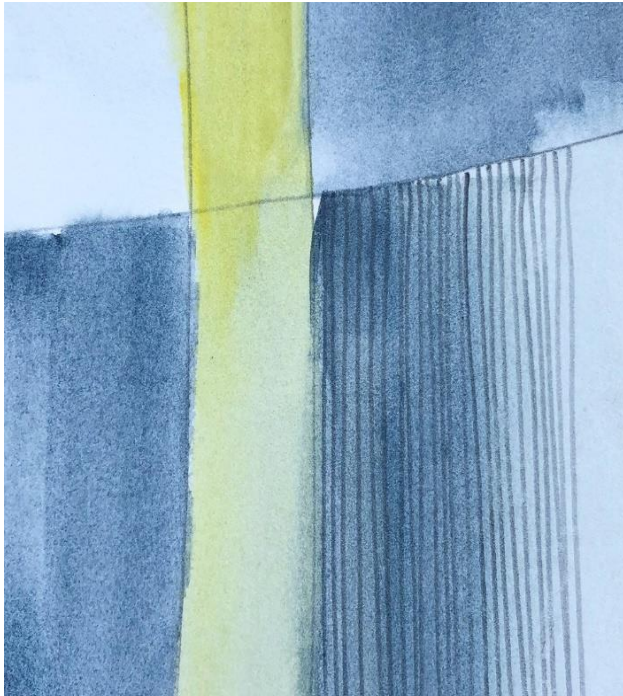
Great examples are 'tyvek' home insulation, ripstop nylon, reusable shopping bags, honeycomb paper, paper bubblewrap, sailcloth, banners and sails.

A zip tie is nylon tie used to tidy up cables for industrial and domestic use. I love using these because they add a lot of structure to my pieces. They can be dyed which gives them a deceptive quality of softness. In the image below the background is a print of zip ties, and the yellow line is applied dyed zip ties.



How would you describe your recent work?

For the last two years I have been working on two strands to my work, using the same starting point of painting. Firstly I have looked at the weavings of the Bauhaus. Anni Albers, Gunta Stölzl and all the [Bauhaus women](#) were so creative – they had to be, since after being promised a school of equality they were funneled into weaving, and areas that were considered more ‘domestic’ than architecture or furniture making which many of them wanted to pursue. I have painted my own versions of them, photographing them and reworking the combinations on the computer to print cloth digitally as a basis for new smocked and pleated pieces (see below).



Water colour painting inspired by the work of Anni Albers.



Contour 3, digital print from painting, smocked and stitched into shape.

Secondly, I have created pieces which are more organic in shape and subject; they evoke looking down on the world from a plane. I take in the ebb and flow of the world below, observing man-made or natural forms that I paint; these become the underpinning of my textiles designs (see below).



Ealish Wilson, Repeating Digital Print

What would you say is the main challenge in your practice?

Time, ideas and scale: I simply love making and trying things out, but my work is very time-consuming. I have many creative plans and generally they are scaled up in size which has a huge time demand. I am obsessed with repeats and perfecting them from my photographs; this can take hours. All the smocking I do is by hand. Even though I know a piece will take time this is a meditation for me. I find comfort in the rhythm of repetition.

Being a Mum is also a challenge to work around – trying to grab those moments. I am very proactive about highlighting the value of making to my daughter.

How have these recent periods of lockdown affected your work?

I have found this past year very difficult to work. We moved to York late 2019 and I was just getting going with a space at Pica on Grape Lane when the pandemic hit. I have gone through long periods of not working this year, feeling totally uninspired, wondering what it's all for, focusing on my family, and trying to make life as fun as possible for a four-year-old.

Instead of making I looked a great deal at artists who could keep going – the incredible Matthew Burrows who created the [Artist Support Pledge](#) on Instagram as a new way to sell work, [Charlie Mackesy](#) with his inspirational drawings and quotes to lift daily spirits, artist friends who suddenly had time and have created whole bodies of new work.

I am beginning to resurface, working more regularly again, creating, experimenting with materials, and looking forward to sunnier times for everyone. I have been featured in the January/February 2021 issue of [Embroidery Magazine](#).

I will be at [York Open Studios](#) on July 10/11 and 17/18 (Venue 74, Pica Studios).

Do you have a website where our members can find out more about your practice?

Yes, it's www.ealishwilson.com.