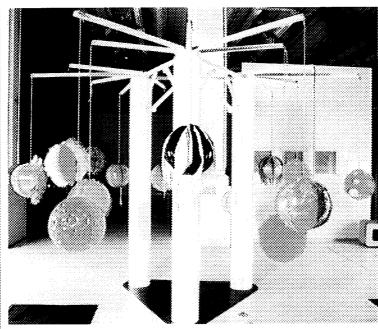
EXHIBITIONS

between the different types of artwork commissioned by manufacturers: miniatures, small-scale depictions of a proposed pattern; sketches, full-size rough drawings; and finished artwork, detailed full-colour working drawings from which blocks or rollers could be cut. Designs could be sold at any of these three stages, and once released to the manufacturer, the studio itself had no further involvement in the production process and exerted no further artistic control.

Although tantalisingly little is known about most of the Studio's designers, the second section of the exhibition - 'Designers at Work' presented brief case studies of the careers of four individuals. Arthur Silver, the studio's founder, was a gifted and multifaceted designer who died tragically young at the age of 43. Harry Napper, a key figure between 1893-98, was responsible for the Silver Studio's pre-eminence in the field of Art Nouveau. Winifred Mold, one of the few women designers employed by the Studio, specialised in dress fabrics, working from home between 1912-35. Frank Price, a superb draughtsman and period design expert, worked for the studio intermittently from 1922 until its closure in 1963.

'Getting Ideas' examined the type of visual material collected by the Studio as a source of reference. In the early years Japanese motifs were a major inspiration, and Arthur Silver also compiled albums of photographs of flowers and plants. His son Rex travelled to France to see the Paris exhibitions of 1900 and 1925, bringing back invaluable information from the latter about the latest trends in colourful abstract 'Moderne' design. Manufacturers frequently requested patterns in a similar idiom to those that had already proved commercially successful. Rex Silver had the difficult job of liaising with clients, whoas demonstrated by correspondence from the archive - could frequently be extremely critical and rude.

Although the Silver Studio closed almost 40 years ago, the lasting commercial value of its designs still lives on. MoDA have recently launched their own range of bed



'Inflatable Spheres', Bree Croon, rubber, fabrics

linen, and other revenue funding is derived from licensing companies such as Designers Guild and KLJM/Lee Jofa to reproduce Silver Studio designs. Just as the Silver Studio once looked to other countries and designers as a model for its own output, so present-day manufacturers now trawl through its archives for ideas. This was a modest but informative exhibition, telling a dignified and salutary tale. LESLEYJACKSON

Coming to our senses

McManus Galleries, Dundee 30 March - 17 June 2001 Catalogue: £8 Craftspace Touring There is much talk about broadening access to the arts, and it is good to see evidence of this being achieved. And what a remarkable thing it is, to walk into a gallery - a normally staid, municipal one at that - and join a throng of happy people, having fun. Birmingham-based Craftspace Touring, in partnership with a core group of museums and galleries, all actively committed to developing access strategies, devised Coming to Our Senses, a 'multi-sensory contemporary crafts exhibition'. Its aims were ambitious

and laudable: 'to change perceptions of crafts, and offer ways for people of all ages to experience crafts through the senses.'

While several of the 14 main commissioned pieces drew on materials-based disciplines - textiles, ceramics, and metal - mixed media, light and electronics were more often deployed. My own small quibble would be that the sensual range and subtlety of crafts disciplines were not fully exploited; if you went looking for David Pye's 'sense of surface quality' or what Edmund de Waal calls the 'powerful haptic resonances [of pots]', you would be disappointed. Primarily you were invited to become a part of the artwork, and, apparently most revolutionary of all, to touch it.

Light and electronic sound effects offered the most interactive fun. Andrew Stonyer's Explorer was a darkened room where a movable 'wand' triggered weird patterns of light and sound from coloured neon tubes. A more elaborate experience was Sarah Taylor's 'light emitting interactive fibre optic panel' – developed with the University of York's Electronics Centre. Fronds of fibre optics changed colour and moving your hand over the panel produced groovy musical sounds.

A sort of do-it-yourself son et lumière for the computer age.

Handling objects was surprisingly satisfying - arguably what is distinctly pleasurable about the applied arts. Poking about, lifting flaps, finding strips of braille poetry sewn into seams of strange period costumes by Kei Ito, provided this at one simple touchy-feely level. You were allowed to use your whole body to flop, roll and fall on Marcus Rowlands' large leather 'cushions' one of which vibrated with a pulse. Case Histories by Kate Allen were portable, self-contained pieces. Suitcases full of surreal objects such as a feather-covered hammer, or the contents of a picnic hamper permanently stuck with sand, were a microcosm of the show.

Exploring the nature of sensual disability was a theme taken up by Anna Cocciadiferro. Four suspended costume pieces made you aware of loss of physical co-ordination and control. The elaborately tactile Cochlea Skirt was baffling in construction and difficult to work out how to wear. Magnetic Extending Glove had exaggeratedly long weighted cone-like fingers, emphasising what it must feel like to have no manual dexterity.

Michael Anastassiades' largely conceptual piece – three booth-like spaces lit by shaded light-bulbs – was the work that had least immediate impact. I was told first that it wasn't working properly – the lights are meant to respond to varying noise levels suggesting social or antisocial behaviour – but there was something disconcerting about standing there trying to get them to work. The piece made you feel self-conscious, giving an insight into what it might be like to be disabled.

Other interactive installations included guessing the scents within metal bottles; gently shaking ceramic containers to distinguish between low-fired dark dull sounds, compared to shiny clear high-fired pieces; sitting on a woven willow seat within a reed/willow enclosure that was vaguely reminiscent of some southsea island 'sitooterie'; patting shocking pink inflatable spheres

JULY/AUGUST 2001

EXHIBITIONS

covered with feathers, fake fur, zips, leather, velvet, plastic and fringing.

This was a busy exhibition and it was definitely not a typical gallerygoing public either. Wee lads returning two days running - art gallery becomes amusement arcade. Gallery attendants, normally bored and officious, were having a great time - explaining things, enjoying their jobs. The exhibition did seem to spark something quite elemental - like in a playgroup, where handling sensual things brings such childlike pleasure. You did have to suspend sophistication; none of it was great art, much of it looking a little bit shabby too from so much handling, but what the heck? One of its aims was to lead a new audience into crafts and it did this with great gusto. PHILIPPA SWANN Coming to Uur Senses tours to the Bilston Craft Gallery, Mount Pleasant, Bilston WV147LU, (01902) 552507) from 30 July - 7 October 2001, to the Ucheldre Centre, Millbank, Holyhead, Anglesey LL65 1TE, (01407) 763361, from 22 October - 6 January 2002, and to the Bracknell Arts Centre, Ringmead, Bracknell RG12 7PA, (01344) 427272, from 28 January - 28 April 2002.

ATMOSPHERE: AN EXHIBITION OF WORK BY NEW FIBRE ART AND CALIFORNIA FIBERS

For details of further venues, call

Craftspace Touring, (0121) 608 6668.

Newport Museum and Art Gallery 24 March – 5 May 2001
Poster/catalogue: free
A Newport Museum and Art Gallery touring exhibition
Atmosphere is the second collaboration between California Fibers and
New Fibre Art, a British-based group which includes members from continental Europe. First exhibited at the Oceanside Museum of Art, in California, as the title suggests, each of the 21 exhibitors aimed to capture an atmosphere, ranging from environmental to personal.

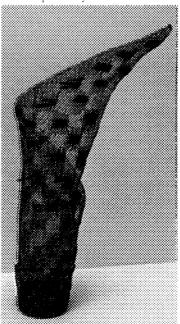
Among those who responded to the landscape, the strongest are those who make the subtlest of references. Sian Martin's warm-toned *River* Vessels 1 and 2 capture the light and movement of the Somerset wetlands in metal mesh, painted and stitched with grasses and wrapped elements. The forms themselves, spiralling triangular cones dense at the bottom and sheer at the top, suggest the delicate movement of grasses in the wind. In contrast, the two large panels by Jacqui Jones are appropriately cold-toned and formal, being responses to winter landscapes. Composed of linked panes of textured pulp and feathers, subtle details evoke the soon-to-be-lost trail of a walker in the snow. The work of these British makers argues tellingly for abstract pastoral art. The elegance of small woven-paper kite forms by Ellen Phillips provides a Californian parallel, inspired by symbolism - in this case of China rather than the landscape itself.

While nearly one-third of the exhibitors showed landscape-inspired pieces, more elected to capture their own or other's memories. Some of these were highly politicised, such as Alastair Duncan's Tenses series, reflecting his Northern Ireland childhood by incorporating barbed wire in small tapestry squares. Neki Revera from Barcelona showed two exquisite but unnerving dischargedyed tiny silk panels, printed with the letter 'A' to represent abuse, aggression and abandonment; the seemingly muddled appearance of The Scarlet Letter 1 evokes the atmosphere abused women inhabit to chilling effect. Others took dreams, myths and mysteries as their starting point, and of these, Sandra Pearson's Off the Sofa wall-arrangement of 15 organzacovered upholstery springs was beautifully judged. Sprinklings of 'lost' things caught in these suggestions of cushions did indeed conjure up the questions she posed: 'What do they tell?', 'What did they see?'

Among the Californians, assured and entirely different works evidenced the rich vein that personal atmospheres provide. For Rosalie Dosik, shrouded hopes are encapsulated in a long winding chain of fibreglass-screen envelopes, connected by their flaps to create pyramidal shapes containing visible

but inaccessible contents. Mari Beth Baloga embroidered a metaphor for 'up-tight' psyches, depicting a wild animal-beset nightmare. Susan Hart Henegar's panels, composed of layered, stitched, photocopied and laminated postcards, addressed her own nostalgia for 'quieter times, calmer people', a response to the present belief that 'E-mail, fantasy worlds and time travel fill in for estrangement'.

However, Henegar's entire statement - and her work - have an up-beat not-too-navel-gazing message, something that also resonates in other pieces that comment on life as an artist. Anne Jackson, another Californian, presented messages incorporated directly into her vivid tapestries. One of her three pieces depicts cherubim handing a plaque to God and framed with these words: 'Dear Sir would you please considered raising the state of my work to the level of fine art Thank You yours faithfully Anne Jackson'. Among New Fibre Art members, Val Copley's organza pocket-panels inserted with egg shells are less assertive, having no words and little colour, but they are equally witty on the same point. Walking on Egg Shells is accompanied by a statement



'River Vessel I', Sian Martin, metal web, grass fibre, 50 cm high, 1997

regarding the artist's need to be seen as both strong and fragile, and the importance of the response of the viewer, who sometimes think artists are 'cracked'.

The theme that binds the works together is the frequent appearance of grids and the emphasis on sensibilities rather than materials. These two aspects are related. The grid is the basic structure of plain cloth, but here writ large - as wire mesh, fibreglass screen, laminated packets, organza pockets, paper squares or overlaid pattern. There is a preponderance of paper and metal. As if to emphasise that it is about approach - stitch, collage, assembly, placement - rather than medium, Sandyland, a book by Genie Shenk, is included, composed of fur, sandpaper, rusted metal, beads, waxed linen and mulberry paper. If only the poster-cum-catalogue, with entries not in alphabetical order and poorly edited, were as well constructed. MARY SCHOESER Atmosphere will tour to the Brewhouse Theatre and Arts Centre, Coal Orchard, Taunton, Somerset TA1 1JL, (01823)

SAINSBURY AFRICAN GALLERIES

283244, from 5 January - 9 February 2002.

British Museum, London WC1 Opened 3 March, 2001 Book: Africa. Arts and Cultures, ed. by John Mack, £16.99 For a long time the British Museum's collection of African art and artefacts was housed at the Museum of Mankind in Piccadilly. Now, as part of a great shift, a sort of heaving of tectonic plates - the British Library books lumbering from Bloomsbury to St Pancras, the Great Court bursting open, the Royal Academy, after a century of trying, enveloping Burlington Gardens - the African collection is back in Bloomsbury, in a two-winged suite of galleries off the Great Court, funded by Lady

And what a fantastic collection it is – approached past very lifeaffirming coffins from modern-day Ghana, and down two flights of steps



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