

Bummock: The Lace Archive

Approved text for exhibition catalogue by Lucy Renton.

How did you access the archive initially and through the project?

I was invited to be the first collaborating artist in the Bummock project following my participation in the 'Summer Lodge' residency run by the Fine Art course at Nottingham Trent University, where the Lace Archive is held. I made a visit at that time. Then two further visits for photographic documentation and finally to collect works for display in the final exhibition when I had the opportunity to meet a well-informed lace specialist, Gail Baxter

What did you choose in the archive and how and why did you choose this? In the spirit of the Bummock metaphor – where the larger part of the iceberg is hidden from view – I chose the most anomalous items I could find: The *Period Guide*, a folder of instructional cards for interior decoration, matching historic periods of English Wooden furniture (Oak, Walnut, Mahogany) with information on the manufacture and design of associated fabrics and ornament, presumably to advise aspirational buyers on matching appropriate furnishings to period interiors. Their target audience is unclear - professional interior decorator, or wealthy amateur? I was drawn to both the physical qualities of the object, and to the implied notion of “authentic” or “inauthentic” combinations of domestic items and designs this object sought to convey. Additionally, the “Fryma fragments” (as I came to call them), I picked because of my interest in samples and swatches. I love them for their potential, their edgeless-ness and provisionality. These brashly coloured swatches, unlike the virginal white or cream of most of the rest of archive, speak cheerfully of vulgarity, rather than purity and taste. Both choices raise questions about ‘proper’ knowledge, discrimination, and social class.

Can you talk more specifically about how you found out about more about the stuff in the archive; or if you did not feel you needed to, please say why?

I used the archive to explore items as they relate to my practice, rather than as a cultural historian. Wanting to find out more about Fryma company, I discovered they had closed some years earlier and the factory knocked down for housing. A photo of the demolished Fryma factory in Nottingham revealed many architectural similarities with the building housing Backlit Gallery, so it seemed an appropriate setting for the work.

Can you talk (if appropriate) about how you differentiated between information gained from catalogues/websites and the information/relationship with the archivist?

I worked from my personal and visual and tactile interaction with the items so experience took precedence over information.

The archivist later told me Fryma also produced textiles used for golf bunker linings and fish tank mesh, and the company invented an extensometer (a device for measuring the length and tensile strength of material under stress) still in use today worldwide. I'm not sure if knowing these details earlier would have influenced the work I made, or may possibly in future as I continue to reflect on my experiences of working with them.

How did you approach the process of working with the archive?

I made photographic documentation at each stage, and invited Danica and Andrew to a residency at hARTslane in Deptford, London, where I cut lattices into paper to interrogate the material properties and processes of lace. I also worked with gouache, lino print and fabric manipulation exploring the physical qualities and concepts my source materials evoked. Mostly I worked in my studio in London, where I live, but later I spent a week in Nottingham working with screenprint, some of which emerged at the final exhibition.

What did you make?

I made a series of art works investigating authenticity and deceit, taste and vulgarity, illusion (trompe l'oeil), the intersection of two- and three-dimensional images, the tension between design and fine art, taxonomic boundaries, colour and surface, folding, pleating, fabric manipulation and forms of construction derived from domestic soft furnishing. I used materials associated with both fine art and domestic mass production processes. From these experiments I made a selection to install in the exhibition at various locations at Backlit, exploring ideas of interior decoration and the (norms) of gallery presentation. There are more works or potential works from this process, which could have a future life beyond the Bummock project.

What knowledge (if any) did you gain from the information of the archive? I didn't dig down in scholarly work around the archive. I took my role as an artist to present an alternative and possibly fictive account of the articles I had chosen.

How did working with the archive benefit/impact on your practice?

It got me using holes, and breaking into the surface of the 2-dimensional image again, which is something I had not done for a long time. Being part of this project also spurred me to visit other historic design archives and museums, the Warner textile archive in Essex; Lyon in France, for the 18th century silk weaving industry; and *Missoni Art Colour* at the Fashion and Textile Museum in Bermondsey, where colourful knitted garments, as well as fabric samples were shown alongside 60's and 70's Italian Op and Kinetic artworks. Consideration of the social, political, migratory and economic histories of textiles fed into to my thinking as I made the work for this show. Working with the Lace archive also made me think about boundaries in established taxonomy, and unstable definitions. A recent show I saw at Camden Art Centre: *Making and Unmaking* curated by fashion designer Duro Olowu, showed antique textiles with contemporary and historic artworks in a way that opened up and challenged narrow thematic modes of display.

My interest in working with historic interiors thorough engagement with the *Period Guide* in particular has led me to my current involvement with a residency at the National Trust property, Eastbury Manor in Barking, London.

How did the archive's specialism relate to your practice (if any)

I work with colour, pattern, repetition and ornament so a textile archive relates closely. The historical association of lace with feminine labour and decoration links to my interest in domestic physical and psychological space as a potential site of decadence and delirium, like the madness inducing *Yellow Wallpaper* of Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Or in other 19th Century fiction, the excess and etiolation of J.K. Huysmans' Jean des Essientes in *Against Nature*. The interior as a space for losing or finding yourself, in safety or imprisonment.