

## REWIND INTO THE FUTURE BY SARAH E. BRADDOCK CLARKE

**REWIND. PLAY. FAST FORWARD.** All of these buttons are pressed with the area of **REWIND INTO THE FUTURE** where the selected artists delve into the past, comment on the present and look to the future.

### REWIND

The medium of textiles, with its rich and diverse history is ideally placed to span such a scope. It sweeps up and digests the past, present and future, all in one go. Weaving, the basic interlacing of fibres dates back at least to 7,000 BC but is still explored as a valid method of construction and expression today where memories and the imagination can happily converge.

Textiles, by its nature is interdisciplinary – a good partner for a wide variety of applications from the human body to architecture and our surrounding environments – both real and virtual. Constantly on the search for the new, the unexplored, the wide realm of textiles impinges on many aspects of our daily lives – enveloping, comforting, stimulating. It is omnipresent and all-pervasive, creeping into our consciousness and informing the very fabric of our lives.

Demonstrated here are traditions combined with new technologies in the form of staged audio-textile installations, recordings of specific sites and being worn on the human body. Reach out and **REWIND INTO THE FUTURE** - open your eyes, ears and mind, press play and turn up the volume.

### PLAY

The international artists have been chosen due to their engagement with new modes of expression as we hurtle forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The field of textiles is an exciting dynamic; a constantly moving and shifting phenomena, ever-expanding its boundaries while honouring its traditions. Artists in **REWIND INTO THE FUTURE** demonstrate a respect and reverence for the history of textiles while also probing into high-tech materials and technologies. For example, Jane Harris, Barbara Layne and Nancy Tilbury are adept at the employment of digital and smart technologies with their incorporation of the clothed human body with integrated or envisioned stimulants. Hybrid or inter-disciplinary design is being seen as a new important area where 'skins' are developed for the body that can react to enhance, protect, embellish and communicate. **REWIND INTO THE FUTURE** for a multi-sensory delight where the human body is depicted in various guises.

The combination of the expected visual/tactile relationships with the audio is demonstrated in the work by Ainsley Hillard, Janis Jefferies and Christy Matson. Their experiments demonstrate the search for analogies between the tangibility of the visual/tactile experience and the abstract nature of sound. This is strongly paralleled and aligned, both conceptually and physically. **REWIND INTO THE FUTURE** for a 'surround sound' where multi-sensory experiences are at the fore.

In these early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century we are used to 'switching on' and to being 'switched on'. Often experienced as a 'touch button/screen' scenario where kick-starting into action is an effortless act. The viewer simply has to sit back, relax and all will be revealed. It can be a passive experience. By incorporating textiles, different senses are touched upon and activated – different buttons are pressed and the result is a richer and deeper one.

Throughout the history of art, artists have embraced working with new technologies – both equipment and materials. The world of art, free from commercial constraints naturally allows for risk taking and pure experimentation – something that all the selected artists have engaged in. Science and art are being combined in high-tech research 'laboratories', purely experimenting with new technologies, smart and high-tech materials where Petri dishes (used for the culture of micro-organisms) and Apple Macs are teamed with mannequins for biological and digital fashion.

Our senses are literally how we make sense of things – how we relate to our own personal environment as well as the larger one. The six selected international artists explore this by employing textiles as reactive or interactive mediums. The audience (as opposed to merely the viewer) is engaged in a total experience – one that is evocative, ephemeral, temporal, transient, dynamic and alive. In this way the area of textiles is pushed into an arena that involves multi-aspect receptions and responses. The inherent properties of their chosen materials are jettisoned into new zones of perception and reception to enrich and enliven their audience by communicating, entertaining and informing. Taking part, the viewer/participant is rewarded with an insight into how such technologies may form a part in our future lives – at work, at rest and at play.

### **EPHEMERALITY**

Textiles are ephemeral – from their beginning virginal state they then, over a period of time become thin and threadbare, take on various patinations (some welcome, some not) to then wear out, disintegrate and perish. Considering this notion of ephemerality, the pairing of textiles with technology is appropriate as technology itself is also frequently ephemeral. Much research and development has been undertaken into the continuing miniaturisation and increasingly soft/flexible engineering of materials. This enables advanced technologies such as electronic devices readily into our clothing, accessories, gadgetry and environments. We can be 'out there' while at the same time 'connected' and 'in touch'. Leave a message and we will get back.

Wearable technology has been explored over the last few decades but has only recently become much more available due to improvements in technology. The realisation that flexibility is key is an important link to textiles and the result has seen the development of soft, flexible, intelligent cloth structures that are capable of responding to stimuli in a variety of ways – changing colour, texture, shape accordingly.

## **TEMPORALITY**

Material and memory can be linked to digital memory when considering the combination of textile and sophisticated digital technologies. Links between cloth, individual/collective memory, nostalgia and digital memory can be made. In this way, memory is a feature of the collaborative work by Janis Jefferies and Barbara Layne who see textiles as playing a key role in conveying the memories of an individual. In their work entitled "Wearable Absence" the relationship between the human body and its covering are made manifest by devices that are alerted to physical changes including heart beat rate and galvanic skin response (the amount of moisture on the skin). Once a bio-sensor is triggered visual and audio information is downloaded to be accessed and either displayed or played via one of two garments.

The sensory attributes of the visual, the tactile and also the audio are explored in **REWIND INTO THE FUTURE**. Sound as an abstract entity is explored as well as the idea of conveying a mood, an atmosphere or bodily functions and changes. In the work on show connections are made between the physical and the non-tangible, the abstract and the literal, the real and the virtual.

## **TRANSITORY**

Showing the clothed, moving body further engages the fluid nature of the textile medium. Many of the selected artists are aware of the look of material in motion, observing how it rises and falls, the effect of gravity, of light, of pressure - the subtleties being captured in video. The world of fashion has embraced new modes of presentation to the traditional catwalk/runway show in creating the short 'fashion film'. This time-based imagery is often far beyond the mere advertisement campaign and many explore the intimacies of cloth and the body.

Softness, flexibility and fluidity are very much an expression of the narrative or concept being conveyed to ably describe a particular collection. Digital technology has enabled both the creation and the dissemination of these evocative (and often provocative) films. This, in turn is being explored by artists working within textiles who are using the human body in motion as a vehicle for expression. Many have found this a very conducive medium to convey the myriad nature of textiles, one that looks set to continue.

## **FAST FORWARD**

The chosen artists are interdisciplinary in their approach, embracing both textile and non-textile materials and processes. In addition, many of the works in **REWIND INTO THE FUTURE** actively seek to combine art with science and technology. Practising artists, scientists, engineers and media practitioners are brought together to expand the boundaries of textiles and reveal new ways of understanding and applying connections between textiles and a wealth of new technologies.

Also apparent are important philosophical, moral and ethical questions concerning identity within our society and culture. Surveillance issues and invasions of privacy are important to be wary of with regards to 'pervasive computing' where intelligent software and engineering technologies are capable of giving a wide and deep profile on any person. How this is then utilised is a cause for both intrigue and alarm. Privacy is being seen as the new luxury where identity theft is a concern and people are protecting themselves. They are not allowing personal information to be so exposed where every bodily movement can be monitored and every response pre-determined and calculated in advance based on past information.

Fast forward to a near future and it is envisaged that textiles and technology will further interact, collaborate and move into hitherto unimagined realms and scenarios of possibility. Collaborations between art/design, science/engineering are territories for cross-fertilisation. Their interactions are set to trigger new forms of expression. How they are perceived and received by the general public is an area of fascination. Different generations and different cultures will each respond according to their own codes of understanding and practice.

What is certain is that the new textile arena will be dynamic and pulsating with the rhythm of life.