



This collaborative exhibition celebrates craft and design practice based on the past, current and future landscape of Irish linen. Twenty textile-oriented practitioners have been linked, through their Celtic roots between Northern Ireland and South Wales by the curator, Jane McCann, to embrace both past heritage and modern style.

Prototypes have been created through the sharing of novel approaches to techniques that include felt making, embroidery, weaving, natural dying, digital finishes and garment making. Designer/makers have been partly supported by both local and international industry. Concepts produced offer the potential to inform the production of new commercial products.

Linen Futures aims to communicate the value of textiles, eroded through globalisation, by encouraging design that emphasises longevity, durability and the timeless quality of linen.

Preparation for the exhibition has created links between designer/makers, museum curators and the linen industry. The exhibition will be supported by practitioner talks and workshops both at the R-Space Gallery and the Irish Linen Centre & Lisburn Museum during Northern Ireland's August Craft Month and also in Donaghadee during Creative Peninsula week.



R-Space C.I.C. is a visual arts and crafts space in the centre of Lisburn city, presenting and commissioning a programme of exhibitions and arts activity. Its ambition is to increase access, understanding and enjoyment of contemporary visual arts, crafts, design and other related arts activities. In collaboration with a diverse range of artists and designers across different media, R-Space provides audiences from a wide range of backgrounds with different points of access to the arts.

Since opening in 2011 it has showcased local, national and international work including Anna Dumitriu's *Normal Fauna* in 2011; Japanese artist Toshinobu Takamitsu's 2014 residency and *Double Flipside*, a collaboration between local jewellers Dr Sarah McAleer and Eddie J Doherty for Craft Month 2014.

This is a first collaboration with artist/maker Jane McCann and *Linen Futures* is most welcome during August Craft Month at R-Space at The Linen Rooms Lisburn.

Anthea McWilliams and Robert Martin, Directors.

R-Space Gallery CIC www.rspaceclisburn.com

IRISH LINEN - A BRIEF HISTORY by Brian Mackey

Introduction The manufacture of linen was once Ireland's most important industry. In the eighteenth century, before industrialisation, linen was woven domestically and carried to Dublin for sale to English merchants. This was of great benefit to the prosperity of Ireland's capital, but it was the province of Ulster that fostered the industry and sustained it for more than three centuries. Indeed, for more than a century north-east Ulster was the chief linen producing region in the British Isles and, in the fifty years before the Great War (1914-1918), the world.

In its heyday, with production at a staggering 100,000 miles of cloth per annum, the Irish linen industry achieved a reputation throughout the world for the range and quality of its fabrics. The industry was held in such high esteem that the words Irish and linen are almost inseparable as a global brand name. Even now, when little linen is made in Ireland, the industry's reputation is the envy of other linen-producing countries.

Antiquity and Versatility



Fig 1

Linen made from the fibres of the flax plant was one of the most important textiles in human history. Its antiquity is relatively well known due in part to the popular fascination with the ancient Egyptians whose tomb paintings show scenes of sowing and harvesting flax and spinning and weaving (Fig 1). There are also many references to linen throughout the Bible such as the

description of how, after the crucifixion, Joseph of Arimathea wrapped the body of Christ in a linen shroud.

Less appreciated is the fact that, after wool, linen was the second most common textile in use. Until the end of the eighteenth century, when cotton became more popular for clothing, people preferred linen for shirts and undergarments as it absorbed perspiration and did not dirty easily.

Linen was also an extraordinarily versatile fabric. It was strong and durable, could be dyed or more commonly bleached white, allowing it to be used for clothing as well as bedlinens, tablelinens and for ceremonial purposes, such as altar cloths and vestments. It could be woven as damask with a full figured design, or diaper with a geometric pattern, printed or decorated with needle crafts such as embroidery or drawn thread work. It could also be woven as a heavy fabric for sail cloth, canvas for tents or even for covering aircraft frames. Aerolinen was of such importance to the Allied victory during the Great War that in 1918 Lord French, commander of the Home Forces, proclaimed that the "the war in the air" had been "won on Belfast linen wings". Similarly, during WWII (1939-45) some 54 million square yards of linen aeroplane fabric alone was produced in Northern Ireland.

The Middle Ages

In Medieval Europe the greatest centres of fine linen production were in Germany, northern France and the Low Countries. This is evident in the cloth terms still in use today with cambric from Cambrai, diaper from Ypres and hollands, a fine linen cloth from, what is now the Netherlands. Bruges and Antwerp were the main ports for the export of large quantities of linens to England including fine damasks that were woven on draw-loom in Courtrai and the southern Netherlands.

In Ireland at this time linen cloth was woven to narrow widths, less than two foot wide, and was known as bandle linen. It was largely coarse in quality and met the needs of ordinary people who wove cloth themselves or bought it at market. Its production for home consumption carried on into the eighteenth century, but, wealthier Irish people in the seventeenth century and before who wanted finer linen cloth would have bought imported cloth. The only significant export from Ireland from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century was in hand spun flax yarn which was sold in great quantities in Manchester to weavers in the north of England.

Origins of the Irish Linen Trade

This remained the situation until the latter half of the seventeenth century when in the early 1660s it was reported that a large quantity of linen yarn was exported from Ireland, but little cloth. By the 1680s, however, it is clear this situation had changed as one of the earliest references to a considerable domestic weaving industry in Ulster in 1682 explains: *'The Scotch*

and Irish in Ulster addicting themselves to spinning of linen yarn, attained to vast quantities of that commodity, which they transported to their great profit, the conveniency of which drew hither multitudes of linen weavers'.

The development of export led linen cloth production in Ireland has its origins in late seventeenth century immigration into Ulster, particularly by people from the north of England to the Lagan Valley and north Armagh, the area that would remain the great heartland of the industry. The production of finer cloths may have been assisted by government supported enterprises such as that of the Huguenot Louis Crommelin (Fig 2) who settled in Lisburn in 1698 with a small colony of French workmen, but the venerable tradition that the Huguenots established the Irish Linen Industry no longer has credence.



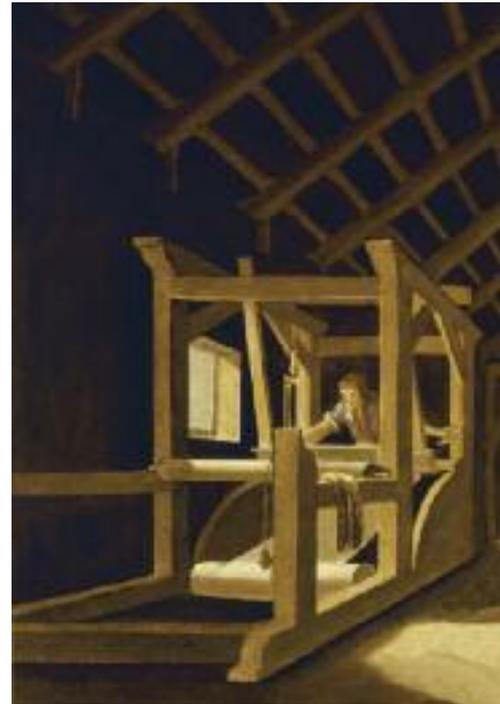
Fig 2

Domestic Industry

The late eighteenth century has been described as the golden age of domestic linen production in Ulster. The industry as it had evolved by then was wonderfully illustrated in twelve stipple engravings by William Hincks in 1783. These show the many stages in the production of linen in considerable detail, revealing earlier hand skills as well as the more recent developments using water power for scutching flax and bleaching cloth.

Flax seed sown in April was ready after three months to be pulled by the roots to preserve the fibres length and then placed in a flax dam for two weeks to soften and prepare it for scutching. Domestic scutching was at first done by hand, but from the 1760s onwards increasing numbers of scutch mills came into operation.

Throughout the eighteenth century and until 1830 hand spinning of linen yarn was carried out by women in their homes as is shown by Hincks (Fig 3). From a young age children learnt to spin and wind yarn with their mothers and older sisters while boys learnt to weave at home with their fathers. (Fig 4) shows a weaver at a plain loom using the hand thrown shuttle.



Figs 3 & 4

weaving at this stage and until the latter half of the nineteenth century (when power-loom came into use) was rare and only found with specialist weaving of fine cambrics or damasks on draw-loom. The most famous of the latter in Ireland was Coulson's Manufactory in Lisburn, established in the thatched building shown (Fig 5) in 1766. The firm's extensive royal and aristocratic patronage brought it deserved acclaim for its fine table-linens. (Fig 6).

The domestic weavers brought their webs to weekly brown linen markets in the centres of weaving in Ulster where dealers or bleachers bought them to have them bleached and finished before taking them to the Linen Hall in Dublin for sale to English merchants. (Fig 7) shows brown linen being bought at an Ulster market.



Figs 5,6 & 7



Bleaching Early bleaching methods were primitive and required major development for the industry to increase its output. The Irish Linen Board established in 1711 recognised this and offered grants to encourage innovation. The wash mill shown by Hincks (Fig 8) was a huge step forward as were improvements to bleaching methods with the use of oil of vitriol instead of buttermilk. By the end of the eighteenth century a new bleaching liquor derived from chlorine allowed bleaching to take place throughout the year. New technological and chemical developments required the bleachers to have ever larger amounts of capital and as a result the larger operators came to dominate the industry. In 1783 the Ulster bleachers challenged the Linen Board by building the White Linen Hall in Belfast, a symbolic shift in the industry's centre of gravity.



Fig 8

Industrialisation In the nineteenth century the bleachers managed the eventual industrialisation of first spinning in the 1830s and later weaving from the 1860s onwards. In the 1820s the Irish linen industry faced a crisis with rival English and Scottish firms in Leeds and Dundee capturing the coarse linen trade through the use of yarn dry spun in mills. It was the introduction of the wet spinning process by power that saved the Irish industry. In 1829 the Mulholland's cotton spinning mill in Belfast burnt down and was replaced with a flax spinning mill using the new wet spun process that allowed the spinning of finer yarns. Within a decade there were some 30 flax spinning mills in Ulster, the majority in and around Belfast and this reinforced its position as 'Linenopolis' the capital of the industry.

In the period before the Great Famine in the late 1840s, major manufacturers of hand-woven linen cloth controlled the supply of power spun yarn which they put out to weavers and paid for on return of the webs. Power loom weaving, the last phase of the industrialisation of the linen industry, emerged in the latter half of the 19th century. This was the result of the demographic upheaval of the famine, which caused the cost of hand loom labour to rise, along with the great demand for linen in the 1860s, fuelled by the American Civil War and the cotton famine.

Marketing worldwide

In the early nineteenth century the cheapness and popularity of cotton forced the Irish linen industry to find international markets beyond England, until then its main destination. Before the Great War about 50% of all linen exports went to the United States, while the dominions and colonies of the British Empire also emerged as major markets. Participation in the Great Exhibition in London in 1851 and presence at international fairs and exhibitions throughout the world contributed to the industry's success, as did the opening of overseas agencies in the great cities of the world. At the Great Exhibition John Henning of Waringstown received a gold medal for a piece of cambric linen, so fine that 50 feet of it was posted to the bleacher in a moderately sized envelope.

Shown (Fig 9) is William Barbour's stand at the World Fair in Chicago in 1893, and (Fig 10) a brochure prepared by Liddell's, the power loom weavers of Donaghcloney, for the Franco-British exhibition of 1908 which highlights the firm's agencies not only in New York and the Dominions, but in Shanghai, Yokohama and Japan, as well as Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro



Fig 9



Fig 10

in South America, which by then had become a major market for Irish linen. In 1887 Robinson and Cleaver's Royal Irish Linen Warehouse (Fig 11), which had thrived on its mail order business particularly to the United States, was reckoned to have sent one third of all the parcels posted in Belfast.



Fig 11

Twentieth Century Decline

By the end of the nineteenth century the making-up trades had also developed in Ulster and much more cloth was made up into shirts and other clothing, as well as household goods. The Great War and the years following, however, saw a huge contraction in world demand for linen, and though the industry fought back and made a massive contribution to the war effort during the Second World War, the challenges of the post war world were almost impossible to surmount. When paper handkerchiefs, napkins, placemats and hand-towels became popular the industry had no means to compete. In the 1980s and 90s the increased demand for linen apparel seemed to give the remaining dozen Ulster spinning and weaving companies hope of a future in the twenty-first century with clothes retailed by such designers as Paul Costelloe and Ally Capellino but in the end a final collapse came in face of competition from countries with much cheaper labour costs. The few linen firms that survive today to provide goods on reputation or in old markets do so with yarn spun and cloth largely woven in countries other than Ireland.

Jane McCann

My ambition in 'Linen Futures' is to promote ageless design with the potential for a future multiplicity of styles appropriate for inclusive wearers - men and women - young and mature. I have approached the mass-customisation of a basic shirt in simple and enduring styles exploring the use of linen as a durable and relatively sustainable fibre. Each shirt has been designed with the details of the final garments created as a result of collaboration with specific project partners. Ultimately

I would like to raise awareness of the value and sophistication of textiles through longevity of design so a garment may become an 'old friend'. In contrast to my experience in research and design practice, focused on the application of technical and smart textiles in functional clothing, I have enjoyed rediscovering the use of natural fibres in the design of garments that emerge from an historical association with linen in Northern Ireland.



Stella Jose

As a textile artist and maker, I use stitch and thread to transfer my drawings onto cloth. I love the tactile nature of thread and the organic lines that are created by stitch; these combined add depth and longevity to my imagery.

The inspiration for my designs for the female aprons comes from the flax flower, also known as the 'Wee Blue Blossom'. The flax plant has attractive blue flowers at the tips of its stems and they last only fleetingly. I wanted to capture their beauty in thread and to complement the linen fabric it embellishes. Inspiration for the male apron and waistcoat is derived from the architectural facades of several well known Belfast public houses. Apart from their aesthetic appeal several such establishments were formerly run by A. McCann Ltd, with whom my artist-partner, Jane McCann, has a family connection.



Louise Hardman (Wove in Hove)

Having attended Brighton College of Art and, after studying woven and printed textiles, set up my business 'Wove in Hove'. With my husband Wayne, I relocated from Sussex and now live and work in scenic County Fermanagh, Northern Ireland. The backdrop of this location's land and waterscapes are a constant inspiration for my work.

'Linen Futures' has inspired me to employ a 'waste not, want not' response to hand loom weaving. Hand woven cloth is precious and conventional garment pattern cutting is inevitably wasteful. Through liaison with Jane McCann I recognised that this could be avoided by working with scarf-width cloth culminating in fringed hems, including double cloth 'tubes' for sleeves, and with inserted gussets woven in narrower bands. It was agreed that a relaxed workwear theme would be appropriate and that indigo, with slubbed cotton and linen seemed the natural choice of yarn to create the cloth.



Mandy Nash

I set up my studio in 1983, directly after leaving the Royal College of Art. I primarily make anodised aluminium jewellery but have always experimented with colourful materials, including textiles which have been a constant influence in my work. Therefore, it has been a natural progression to introduce textiles to my practice; I now work regularly in felt, stitch and laser cut fabric.

Wool and linen are ideal companions; uniting the two, with either the wool as the canvas for a linen pattern or vice versa, creates intriguing textures; the wool shrinks trapping the linen fabric, fusing the surfaces, reminiscent of rocky coastlines and sandy, ridged beaches. It makes a soft and tactile surface, evocative of another time, aged and worn like the landscape. Irish designer, Trish Belford has added a screen printed pattern to the surface, transforming it once more, highlighting the contrast between smooth and wrinkled, adding an extra dimension.



Trish Belford

Originator of Belford Prints Ltd (1986-2004) a bespoke textile printing Company, working with Jasper Conran, Vivienne Westwood, Neisha Crosland, Zandra Rhodes. Awarded Honorary Fellowship of the Royal College of Art in 1995, SDC (Society of Dyers and Colorist's) Silver medal for services to the Textile Industry in 2009, and Textile Society Professional Development Award in 2012.

My practice involves working collaboratively across textiles, architecture, craft and science, subverting textiles for new uses and diverse audiences. This work is inspired by Carrickmacross lace, hand printed using a distressed foil technique. The base cloth is pure Irish Linen woven in Dungiven by Flaxmill. The same design has been used for the collaborative textile on felt & linen supplied by Mandy Nash, and the fabric for the shirt made by Jane McCann. The variation in each has arisen from the post processing, same pattern different outcome, something I am continually interested in investigating. 'Small change, big difference'



Claire Cawte

"Linen has been a little taken for granted in fabric history - perhaps because its manufacture was so everyday." (*Cloth, Cassandra Ellis, 2014*).

Whilst not setting out to make history, our collaboration for Linen Futures has led us to explore and experiment with the endless possibilities inspired by the natural landscape.

A beautiful 'hand woven' linen cloth, the threads of which had been manipulated by the hands of my weaver partner, Cecelia, was the starting point. I collected from the garden a bountiful selection of plants and flowers to concoct natural plant dyes, simmering pots of salty lichen and fragrant whins, then used a process whereby colour is transferred through direct leaf contact; the leaves mark the cloth forming a delicate print pattern on the woven surface.

Long distance communication, packages of linen paper, stark woven cloth and rich yellow gorse flowers have made this a magical journey.



Cecilia Stephens

I am primarily a weaver though I also work in paint, paper and print. Being from Portferry in Northern Ireland I use the Irish landscape as my inspiration. After being paired with Claire Cawte, I wove her a piece of simple cloth with different densities in order to give her scope to explore across its surface with feltmaking and natural dyestuffs while she provided me with dyed elements to be incorporated into my weaving.

My exhibition piece is a portrayal of the shoreline, at 'Landsend', Donaghadee. Now the home of Jane McCann, it was formerly the site of a house owned by the Barbour family who had links with the Northern Irish linen trade. The linen warp supports a weft of various materials such as handmade linen paper, flax fibre and linen fabric, resulting in a cloth that, though fine, is able to reflect the three dimensional elements of the landscape.



Lynda Shell

Following a meeting with Johnny Andrews, who has family links to the Titanic and the Irish Linen trade, I decided to draw my inspiration from Titanic's fascinating story. The focus of my work was to combine the glamour and opulence of the early 20th century with the serene beauty of the Ship's now decaying form. In order to create my designs I used photographs of Titanic's historic artefacts and interior details and developed them into contemporary patterns using computer manipulation. The patterns were then silkscreen printed onto Irish linen and further embellished using stitch and beading to give the designs added luxury. Irish linen was extensively used on the Titanic for tableware and bedding because of its reputation for high quality.

I hope that my work will inspire further commercial usage of linen and encourage a greater future for the Irish linen trade.



Johnny Andrews

Having worked in Comber mill since I was 18 and being the 6th generation in the family business I grew up with a passion for linen learning to appreciate its unique qualities. Following the closure of the mill in 1997 we have repositioned our family business in on-line retailing trading through the Clatteringford brand. We have promoted a more contemporary image for quality linen products as a living and affordable fibre selling a range of high quality apparel, bed and table linen. In particular, we celebrate linen as the best fibre to sleep in, enhanced through its natural anti-allergenic properties. With a family connection to the Titanic, which epitomized the wealth and opulence of the Edwardian era and the success and peak of Ulster's industrial achievement we have used a traditional pattern to create a range of Titanic table linen. It is important to keep the linen industry alive in Ireland and to promote 'living linen' to ensure that linen fibre is appreciated for its beauty, crispness, coolness and comfort.



Susan Smith

Fabric of all kinds has held a fascination for me since my childhood forays into making dolls' clothes and, like most stitchers, I have amassed a huge stash of cloth over the years. My museum background fostered an interest in vintage textiles which I search out at boot fairs or in charity shops. Domestic linen such as pillow cases, traycloths and tablecloths have often been lovingly embroidered by amateur needlewomen and trimmed with lace edging and inserts. Intended to last a lifetime, such now outmoded items may have been "kept for best" or used daily, repeated laundering enhancing the handle of the linen and making it smoother and softer with every wash.

For this exhibition I have salvaged the good sections from stained or damaged linens (some passed on to me by my collaborative partner, Fiona McKelvie), to make usable contemporary artefacts and give this strong, rescued linen a new lease of life.



Fiona McKelvie

Textiles of all types have played an important role in my working life; my special interest being in vintage and antique linens - Irish linen in particular. I find so many pieces which have seen better days and I have made it my mission to restore them to a useful life by dyeing them. Revived Damask is the result, an inevitably limited edition collection of damask napkins and cloths ready for a new life in colour and sold through my business, McBurney & Black. Other finds are still stunningly beautiful, just in need of some TLC; damask table runners from 1883 for example, as fine as the day they were woven, are freed from years of storage dust and yellowing and offered to a new audience.

For 'Linen Futures' I have had the opportunity to collaborate with Susan Smith, who has transformed damaged pieces from my stash into beautiful new objects - Revived Damask in a different form.



Pauline Hearn

I have always been aware of my parents' choice to leave Ireland and their families to start a new life in Wales in the 1940s, due to the poverty in Ireland at that time. My grandmother, and many like her, would have cried such tears of sadness at the loss of her children. This was my inspiration to create a series of linen handkerchiefs; a simple piece of cloth that could hold such sadness was the starting point of my work.

Linen was formerly fundamentally vital to the Irish economy and would have been used by rich and poor alike. Following research into the mass emigration of the Irish, I have used my found information to screenprint statistics and hand stitch nostalgia onto linen to record these events. Today in Ireland huge numbers of young people are still emigrating and linen handkerchiefs are still being produced.



Jackie Sleator

Linen was an important source of employment in Ireland in former times. My grandfather, aunt and cousins worked in the linen industry over many years. With the collapse of the textile industry, many moved on to other sources of employment or emigrated to the New World. My own siblings, though not involved with linen, emigrated to Canada and Australia in the '60s, '70s and '80s.

Making fine felt clothing and accessories, using mainly silk and merino wool, is my speciality. However, I had never previously made felt using linen so this project presented me with an opportunity not only to discover if and how linen might re-invent itself as felt clothing but also to explore how this might be achieved on an industrial scale. In addition it has led me to connect with my family by tracing their emigration story and paying homage to their work in linen manufacture.



Sue Shields

Originally an illustrator, I usually make use of various textiles in conjunction with drawing. Having recently made a series of conventional dolls, I decided to explore how effectively a doll made from a screen printed fabric could be made to feel three dimensional by stuffing the shape and finding its form through stitching through that stuffed shape. This way of working grew out of experimenting with the properties of linen in terms of printing, appliqué and sculpting.

It was good to work with Sue Cathcart whose dolls are beautiful 'one offs', and to realise how many different ways of working could lead to the outcome of a doll. Some of my outcomes, though, would be more properly described as padded 'busts' or shaped cushions; these represent such characters as Mae West and Dorothy Parker, whose well-known quotations are printed on the reverse.



Sue Cathcart

My work is largely made from Papier Maché, with a lot of 'make do and mend', recycling and assemblage of scraps and junk; I make 3D dolls and creatures from it. My cards are all based on my favourite character, Mr Papers, and I have designed cards with him for 'Linen Futures' based on 1950's adverts.

I work for National Museums Northern Ireland as a Life Long Learning Officer. Some of the linen in the Museum's collections is traditional white work that would formerly have been embroidered by women to provide an income in rural Ireland. I was interested in those who sewed the clothes, those who wore the clothes and the endless hours of stitching that women had to do to feed their families. I have over-stitched the costumes of my dolls and, in doing so, I have spent time, energy and patience making them - though my sewing is sadly lacking. I have made two types of doll: past women and future women, their faces covered with the pages of fairy stories where women always seem to be weaving and sewing!



Cath Lewis

I work with a variety of materials: reclaimed threads and cloth, homemade inks, collected dyes and pigments, handmade papers, weathered woods and metals. I collect, choose and layer textures, shapes & forms, surfaces & marks, that are an expression of physical and emotional landscapes: times, places, relationships and memories that are personal, sometimes fleeting, ephemeral, visceral and embedded.

My practice has its origins in textile printing but this is now intertwined with photography, film, stitch, sculpture and book-making. I experiment with materials, making and processing in a search to describe how the basic elements have evolved and events have imprinted themselves onto my mind.

Fragments of flax materials are brought together in assemblages, with pattern and gestural marks made by print, dye, stitch, drawing and other media. The collecting and processing is all part of the story: a narrative of Irish linen is being built up.



Donall Billings

The inspiration for my work on Linen Futures stems from a wide variety of sources. My family has had experience in working with linen from the mills to the museums and I have always had a personal interest in the history of the fabric. I graduated from the University of Ulster, Belfast in Fine Art, specifically Printmaking, surrounded by the wealth of information on, and tradition of, the linen industry.

Over time I have had cause to work on a variety of projects involving linen which has led to expression in sculpture and printmaking and the future of my involvement in linen continues to grow. I consider this exhibition an opportunity to be able to combine printmaking and textiles, blending craft, skills and artistry, to facilitate a continuation of a once thriving industry, taking it into a new and exciting direction.



Alison Taylor

Co-author of the 2014 book, *'1000 Dresses: The Fashion Design Resource'*, I had formerly designed textiles and ran a successful fashion knitwear business for fifteen years selling to an International clientele. More recently (when time away from my full time post as Senior Lecturer at the University of the West of England, Bristol permits) I have been developing work using digital embroidery to translate imagery and ideas onto fabric for fashion and interiors.

My current project involves the creation of textiles for interiors, inspired by turn-of-the-20th-century design heritage, heralded by Robin and Lucienne Day. This is sympathetic to my own design aesthetic and fitting within the context of my 1960's split level house overlooking the Welsh Valleys with a view of the Sugar Loaf Mountain in the distance. Holidays in St Ives have also reinforced my passion for the work of Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson and my love of the Cornish coastline and the Gower Peninsular, which has set the scene for my home decoration ideas.



Mario Sierra (Mourne Textiles)

For over half a century, Irish heritage brand Mourne Textiles has been weaving fabrics and designing furnishings at the foot of the Mourne Mountains in County Down. This family business, started by late Norwegian design pioneer Gerd Hay-Edie, uses traditional weaving techniques on custom-made handlooms, to create a contemporary lifestyle collection.

Gerd handed down these techniques to daughter Karen Hay-Edie, a master-weaver in her own right who in turn passed the baton to her grandson - me. Gerd's name became a staple in mid 20th century British design; she developed long-standing collaborations with Robin Day for Hille & Co and with Terence Conran, for whom she designed upholstery and rugs.

Mourne Textiles sources yarns from Donegal, which it custom dyes to match the heritage pieces and iconic designs created by Gerd, bringing her designs back to life for a new generation.



Elspeth Thomas

I have been involved with fashion and textiles for most of my career but, since studying for a Degree in Contemporary Practice in Cardiff, I have specialised in machine embroidery. Animals, dogs in particular, have always been an important part of my life and frequently feature in my work whether on bags, panels or cushions; they are often commissioned as a memento for a much loved pet.

Having been partnered with Penny for this exhibition I felt an immediate affinity with her as a fellow dog lover and feel that her sensitive dog portraits really capture the spirit of the animals she portrays. I have interpreted her wonderful images into monochrome stitch designs which could be used either for interiors or as fashion accessories.



Penny Patterson

I have a family background in textiles as my father, James Mairs, manufactured tweed in Newtownards until his death in 1971. These tweeds were exported all over the world to such prestigious outlets as Burberry and Liberty of London. My father was a brilliant designer and I really appreciated the textures and beautiful colours used in his designs. One of our looms is in use at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum.

Mainly self taught, my painting style has been developed over the years and, under the name Penny Patterson Mairs, I have completed hundreds of animal commissions including dogs, horses and cats. Some of these works, mainly watercolours, are now in England, America, South Africa and Switzerland.

I am a member of the Ulster Society of Woman Artists and have exhibited on several occasions. It is inspiring to be associated with the 'Linen Futures' exhibition and to have the opportunity to interact with other craft specialists.



Invited Artist - Sirpa Mörsky

Linen Tulip damask has 'followed' me since 1977 when I started my studies, and subsequent role as a lecturer, at Wetterhoff Institute of Craft, Design and Teacher Education in Hämeenlinna, Finland. Fredrika Wetterhoff started the institute in 1885 to provide education for young women with weaving as a major subject. The tulip pattern represents one of the earliest damask designs from the school, still being produced by the Lapuan Kankurit company. They also re-produce linen

tablecloths, designed from the 1930-1970s by Dora Jung, who developed traditional weaving to create modern damask. I once had my own flax field, and engaged in raw flax treatments to make linen fibre, spin yarn, weave fabric, and sew the final product. I now use both the Wetterhoff tulip damask, in the Jugend style from 1900, and Jung's Kaarna (Bark) designed in 1960s. Originally for tablecloths, these designs now have the possibility to be worn as everyday clothing.



I was delighted when Robert and Anthea invited me to stage an exhibition to celebrate 'Linen Futures'. Rather than a solo show, I proposed that I build on my past experience in curating a presentation of collaborative work. For the past two decades, in academic research, I have endeavoured to find strategies to cross boundaries between design disciplines and areas outside the clothing and textile field, in particular adopting an inclusive, user-led approach to more sustainable design solutions for technical and smart textiles.

This exhibition has offered a refreshing contrast, enabling me to go back to my Northern Irish roots in exploring my passion for Irish linen. As a member of the MaP group, of Makers and Practitioners, alongside my academic role in South Wales, I have had the opportunity to develop new links for them with designer makers representing the Northern Irish textile fraternity. The resulting collaboration has involved the two communities, including both designer/makers and industry representatives, in talking about and experimenting with the contemporary applications for linen.

I have enjoyed working with, and wish to thank, all the collaborators and contributors to the exhibition. I am particularly encouraged by the enthusiasm of so many of the Welsh team in funding themselves to come to Ireland, including the designer of this catalogue, Brian Shields. On behalf of us all, I invite visitors to the exhibition, who find the prototypes or other examples of interest, to make contact with me:

Curator, Jane McCann
jane.mccann47@gmail.com



Makers and Practitioners
www.mapgroup.org.uk

MaP (Makers and Practitioners) is a collective group of artists based in Wales. The group members are passionate about their work and about expanding the audience for contemporary art and craft with an emphasis on textiles. The artists pride themselves on their approachability and encouragement of others. Some already have national and international reputations; all have a wealth of complementary experience in a surprising variety of fields including textile media, illustration and jewellery. The aim of the group is to combine their diverse knowledge and skills and challenge the boundaries of traditional crafts.

Through innovative exhibitions and the development of new collaborative techniques we find audiences are inspired and encouraged to enjoy the creative world. Since its inception in 2001, the group has exhibited in Wales and the UK and, in collaboration with the Canadian textile group *Diagonale*, has had an exhibition in Canada touring since 2008. Members of the group have also delivered educational workshops supporting the exhibitions.

Linen Futures exhibition is a collaboration between Jane McCann, ten Northern Irish artists and ten Welsh artists from MaP (Makers and Practitioners).

Jane McCann and all the artists involved in this exhibition would like to thank the following for their help and encouragement in putting this exhibition together.

Our major sponsor

Ulster Weavers Ltd. (contact: Jonathan McAllistair).

And

Enrich & Endure (contact: Sarah and Lorcan Quinn).

Flax Mill Textiles (contact: Hermann Baur).

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Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum (contact Elaine Flanigan and Brian Mackey).

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McCaw Allan (contact: Stanley Hadden).

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