

*The Great Unravelling: an exploration of the ways in which fine art textile artists are telling stories of climate breakdown.*

*Emma Yorke*

**DRAFT PRESENTATION**

- 15-20 minutes presentation
- 10-15 minutes discussion

# Proposal

With reference to Donna Haraway's discourse on entanglement and the threads that bind human and more-than-human life on our planet, we will explore how the work of contemporary fine art textile artists is contributing to the vitally important story of living through this era of climate emergency.

We will consider how fine art textile practitioners are bearing witness to the present moment, in relation to the long tradition of the production of fine art textiles as evidence of the maker's temporal and spatial narrative.

With reference to my own textile-based practice, and the work of other artists, we will explore the methodological and material choices that fine art textile artists make as they tell their versions of this story of the 'great unravelling' of the existing ecological framework through their creative practice.

We will consider examples of textile artists producing work with a data driven perspective, as well as artists documenting their subjective, lived experiences of species and habitat loss and those presenting their visions of our future world.

## Introducing Donna Haraway

- Understanding of the world as an interconnected web, rather than as systems of linear isolated 'units', recognising the co-dependence and equal value of all the organisms on the planet, and importantly, recognising the limitations of thinking in this linear way and the way that these thought systems encourage the privileging of one life system over another, and encourage exploitative practices.
- 'Staying with the Trouble' as living in the present tense, in honest acknowledgement of the (imminent) state of ecological collapse, mass extinction and climate emergency.
- H. urges us to think in terms of 'symptoiesis' (p5) or 'making with' as an alternative model for being in the world – I think this is a really interesting intersection with the way that artists tend to think about being in the world- noticing connections, considering carefully the subtleties of situations and responding deeply and with great care to what they see around them.
- H. talks explicitly about this in chapter 3 of her book 'Symbiogenesis and the Lively Arts of Staying with the Trouble' and I will refer to her examples later in the talk

## Why textile artists are so well placed for 'Staying with The Trouble'

- Our practice necessitates material choices (synthetic/ natural fibres – cotton/ linen/ flax/ plants).
- We (most times) have connections to industrial textile production- the second most polluting industry after oil & gas with vast water usage.
- The close relationship to textiles and the embodied experience (tactile/ clothing/ significance in cultural languages) means that our practice is always tied into materiality and modes of material production which have a wide web of interconnections.
- The long tradition of the production of textiles as evidence of the maker's temporal and spatial narrative- i.e. physical records of the material and societal concerns of the maker as well as personal narratives or artistic choices.
- The historical relationship between land & textiles as key sustainers of life & societies:
  - i. e.g. South America (G&G)
  - ii. e.g. Women's Work
  - iii. e.g. Haraway on sheep

## How I am defining 'Fine Art' textiles for the purpose of this talk

- Understanding of 'textiles' in expanded material sense and as including the methodologies of textile production (e.g. knotting, plaiting, weaving, tufting).
- The term 'Fine Art' is used to distinguish here from textiles produced solely for commercial or utilitarian purposes (although I acknowledge that this is not a clear distinction and one which many cultural traditions don't recognise) and understands the maker to have had an intention or consideration when making the work beyond the purely technical construction.

I will share some of the methodological and material choices that fine art textile artists make as they tell their versions of this story of the 'great unravelling' of the existing ecological framework through their creative practice.

- The Great Unravelling- introduce concept- my weaving and practice.
- Explain partial nature of examples chosen (people connected via my web- would love to hear about other examples in the discussion).
- We will consider examples of textile artists producing work with a data driven perspective, as well as artists documenting their subjective, lived experiences of species and habitat loss and those presenting their visions of our future world.

# How I came up with these categories

‘What did ancient people try to accomplish when they deliberately made cloth bear meaning? A good look at folk customs and costumes recently in use reveals three main purposes. For one thing, it can be used to mark or announce information. It can also be used as a mnemonic device to record events and other data. Third, it can be used to invoke “magic” – to protect, to secure fertility and riches, to divine the future, perhaps even to curse.’ (WW p149)

I am interested here in work that seeks to convey meaning in relation to the ecological crisis-

- I. through marking data driven knowledge and announcing that information
- II. through recording direct experience of the events of this era of climate emergency
- III. through responding to the situation (with the understanding of a response as an act of giving back) by acknowledging the truth of the future that is coming and ‘gives back’ as a marker of truth-telling and/ or as a ‘magical’ gesture that aspires to activate healing and reparation.

This also reflects the three main strands of my own work.

# Artists producing work with a data driven element

‘The biologies, arts, and politics need each other; with involuntary momentum, they entice each other to thinking/ making in sympoesis for more liveable worlds that I call the Chthulucene.’

Haraway (p98)

- Tali Weinberg (USA)
- Morfydd Ransom-Hall (UK)
- EY – Gallitrops (UK)
- Caroline S. Roberts (USA)

(Slide with image from each to be included)



# Artists documenting their subjective, lived experiences of species and habitat loss

- Alexandra Kehayoglou (Argentina)
- EY – Plim Plash (UK)
- 8,000 people in Collaboration ‘The Crochet Coral Reef’ (Haraway p. 76) (plus Roseline Young - Bleaching Coral Reef & Ruth Tabenacy – bleached corals made from plastic waste from her own medical treatment)(both USA)
- Cecilia Vicuna (Chile)
- Otobong Nkanga (Nigeria)

(Slide with image from each to be included)

# Artists presenting their visions of our future world

- EY- Estuarine
- <https://www.jenniferskotter.com/persistent-soft-bodies/> - plastic made jelly fish in a post human world (USA)
- Melody Overstreet (USA) – woven visions of a future in balance
- Haraway – Navajo-Churro sheep (p90)- complex cross over of textile materialities & ecologies
- Claudy Jongstra (Netherlands) – model of sustainable practice

(Slide with image from each to be included)

# Discussion

- Ecologically aware changes to practice taken or planned by the group (e.g., material choices)
- Considerations of audience and intentions for work to serve a didactic purpose on these issues (or not)
- The potential of textile fine artists to work collaboratively/ collectively to amplify these issues going forward
- Culture Declares toolkit ideas /my declaration/ action plan
- Your networks (e.g. Fibre Arts Take Two)

# References

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Pollock (ed). 'Generations and Geographies'. Routledge, 1996

Smith, I, 'Fragile Futures'. Crafts Magazine no.289. pp58-65. 2021

Wayland Barber, E. 'Women's Work.' Norton, 1994