



## WENDY IRVING

### Textile Design

I create woven textiles using hand dyed natural yarn, and high-quality and sustainable natural fibres are key to the philosophy of my work.

Each piece tells a story about the human condition, expressing the intricacies of emotion, struggle and consequence



found in the everyday. I take inspiration from the people and situations I encounter and explore themes in the work of other artists such as Andy Warhol, Catherine Bertola and Yayoi Kusama.

My latest work is an installation reflecting on the stigma and the impact that this has on people who are experiencing mental illness.

It takes the form of two large pieces and six smaller samples of contemporary



interior decorative cloth, and together they explore stigma and mental illness through the manipulation of bold colour and kaleidoscopic shapes.

With a wide knowledge of techniques, I enjoy exploring new interpretations; and colour plays a vital role in creating and communicating atmosphere and narrative.

One off textiles are created to commission and small batch production runs are created in my studio in Farnham.

# Kaleido – Addressing Stigma and Mental Illness

By Wendy Irving

Please also see my blog and Instagram:

<https://textileweavingdesign.wordpress.com>

<https://www.instagram.com/wovenbywendy/>





## My Aims For This Project

I have produced several woven samples which explore the themes of stigma and mental illness. There is still a lot of stigma around serious mental health issues and the people living with them. I have chosen to address this in my work in order to highlight and hopefully educate those in society who might unintentionally be perpetuating it. "Stigma and discrimination can be as bad as the illness itself. It can prevent people with mental health problems from seeking help when they need it and impact their life chances." (Mind, 2014) "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." (Mandela, 1990)

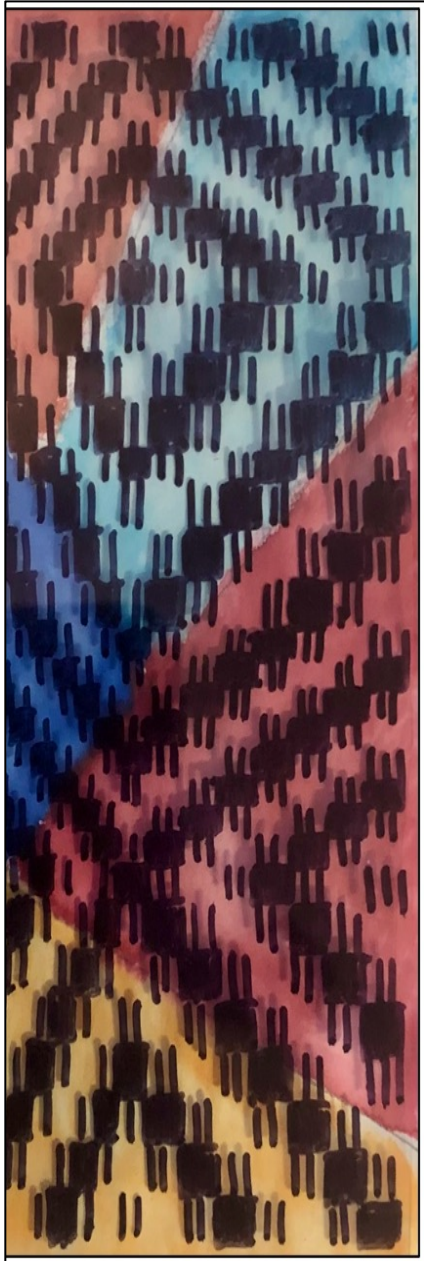
For this project I have used the kaleidoscopic shapes that can be created with the overshot weaving technique. I have also used bold colour to produce a psychedelic and slightly hallucinatory pattern. This pattern and the bold colours used are a metaphor for the mind of a person who is experiencing mental illness. The starting point for me is always pattern, and then I begin to look at the breakdown of the pattern and experiment with ways in which I can create a narrative.

The individual pieces are abstract and therefore, I have explained what I am wanting to portray with each image. The collection is designed as craftivism. Betsy Greer is known for coining the term 'Craftivism' and defines it as "A way at looking at life where voicing opinions through creativity makes your voice stronger, your compassion deeper and your quest for justice more infinite." (Greer in Freeman, 2020)



**Sample 2 & Sample 28** - Experimentation with an overshot design using red-brown in the float pattern. The float design was enlarged in the second sample.

These are the two samples from last term which I have chosen to take further.



## Choices of colour and pattern

Coming from a South African background, I have always been surrounded by bright use of colour in both artwork and textiles, and embracing the hues found in Zulu beadwork has also contributed to my choice of colour for this project. There are also definite links to the geometric patterns found in the beadwork and the kaleidoscopic patterns in my work



## Sketchbook Work



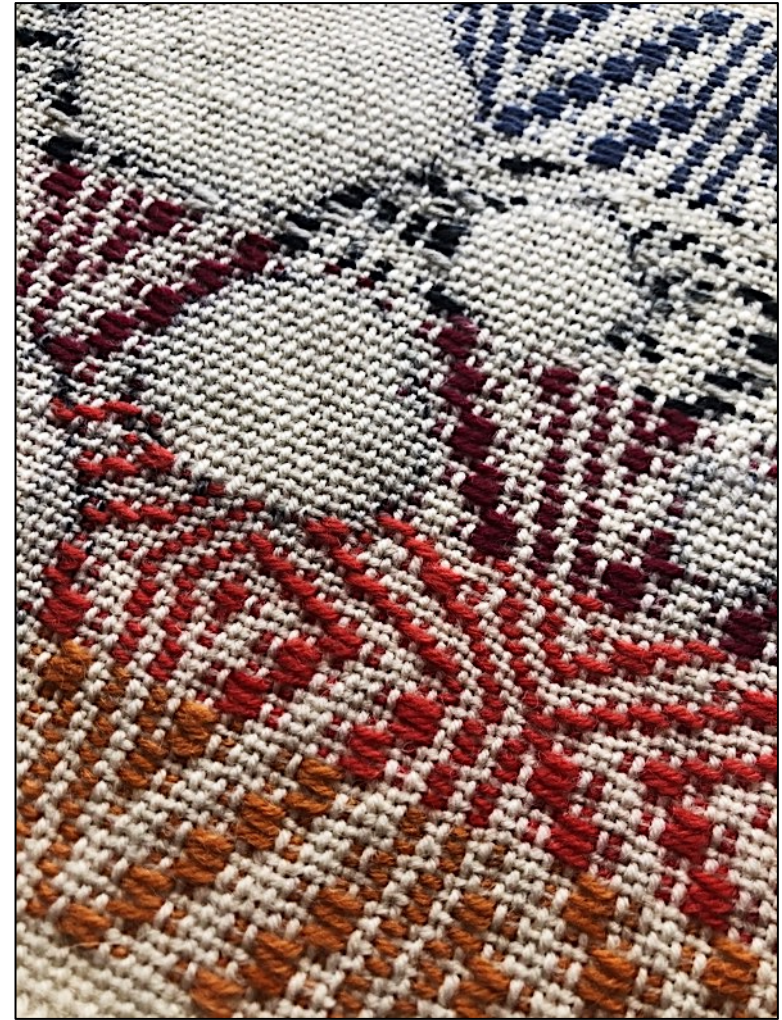
On numerous occasions I have noted that references have been made to a person's mental health condition when they have been making a valid point or challenging someone's ideas. This is often done in order to discredit them. The stigma of having a mental health condition often provides the ammunition for someone to divert from what has been said by implying that they have nothing credible to add to a conversation. The colourful pattern on the paper represents the mind of a person living with a mental illness and the negative words spoken are like bleach, which drips in and begins to create "holes" which erode and undermine confidence and self-esteem.

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*"Sticks and Stones I"*

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*"Sticks and Stones II"*



## "Sticks and Stones I & II"

Words have power; think before you speak. The way we talk about mental illness and the phrases we use to describe conditions matter a lot.

*"There are more negative words than positive or neutral descriptors to choose from when referring someone living with a mental illness." (Avila, 2018)*

Common phrases that perpetuate mental health stigma because they trivialize mental health conditions:

'my ex is such a psycho.'

'the weather is so bipolar today.'

'this makes me want to kill myself.'

'stop being so paranoid.'

'I'm so addicted.'

'that's crazy/insane/mad/nuts.'

'they committed suicide'

'people with schizophrenia are scary'

'I'm so triggered'

'You're being hysterical'

'I'm going to have a panic attack'

'I'm so depressed'

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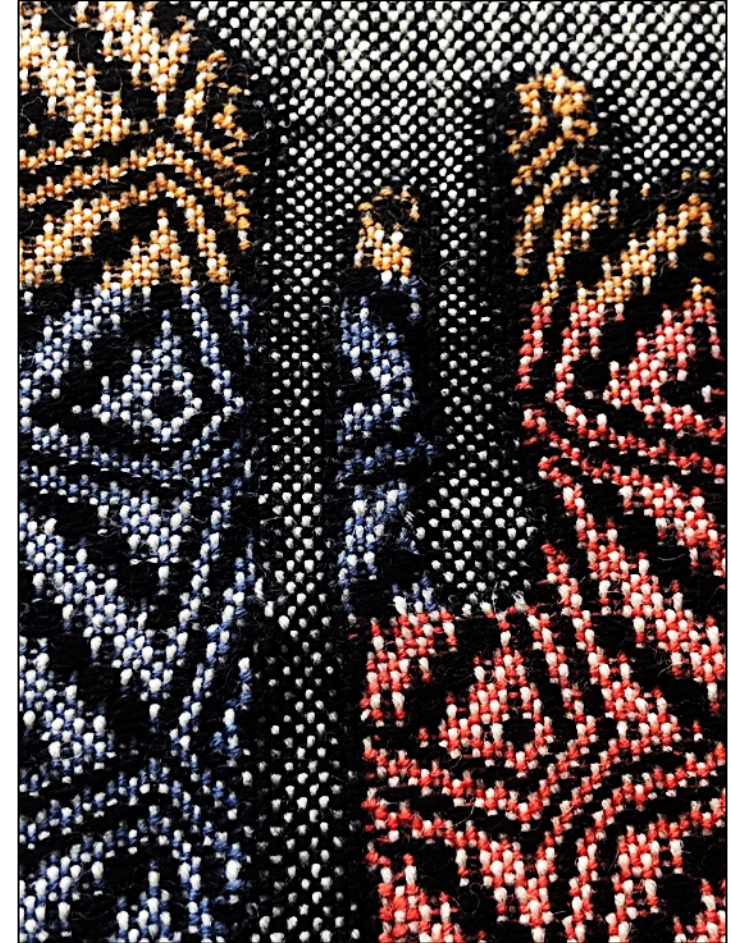
*'Your Words Don't Count'*

### *“Your Words Don’t Count”*

Many people with serious mental illness are challenged doubly. On one hand, they struggle with the symptoms and disabilities that result from the disease. On the other, they are challenged by the stereotypes and prejudice that result from misconceptions about mental illness (Corrigan and Watson, 2002)

On numerous occasions I have noted that comments have been made about a person's mental health when they have been making a valid point or challenging someone's ideas. This is often done in order to discredit them. The stigma of having a mental health condition often provides the ammunition for someone to divert from what has been said by implying that they have nothing credible to add to a conversation.

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*"Adjectify me"*

I have used the image of black paint dripping over a colorful pattern to show what it might feel like to a person who is living with a mental health condition when someone uses the name of their condition as an adjective or to describe their day.

### *“Adjective-fy Me”*

People often use ‘bipolar’ to describe someone who has a mood swing or a change of mind, or they say, ‘I’m OCD’ to express that they like to be organized. If someone meets criteria for one of these disorders, it can be very impairing, and very hurtful when people underestimate the full extent of their impairment. Casual references like this to medical diagnosis help undermine the severity of certain disorders and contribute to greater shame around getting a mental health diagnosis. (Barnie, D, 2020) Stigma not only directly affects individuals with mental illness but also the loved ones who support them, often including their family members.

The potential of humour to help address stigma is welcome, but as a rule of thumb, trivialising or “adjectivizing” diagnostic terms should have no place in our societies (Kousoulis, 2019)

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*"Words Stick"*

## *“Words Stick “*

*The way we talk about mental illness and the terminology we use is important. Certain language sensationalizes mental illness and reinforces stigma. For example, it is better to refer to someone as “living with” or “having a diagnosis of” mental illness as opposed to “mental patient, nutter, lunatic, deranged or mad”. It is also unhelpful to use terminology that suggests a lack of quality of life for people with mental illness. Instead of calling someone a ‘victim’, ‘suffering from’, or ‘affected with’ a mental illness, refer to them as a person who is ‘being treated for’ or ‘someone with’ a mental illness. (EVERYMIND, 2021)*

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*"I am who you say I am"*



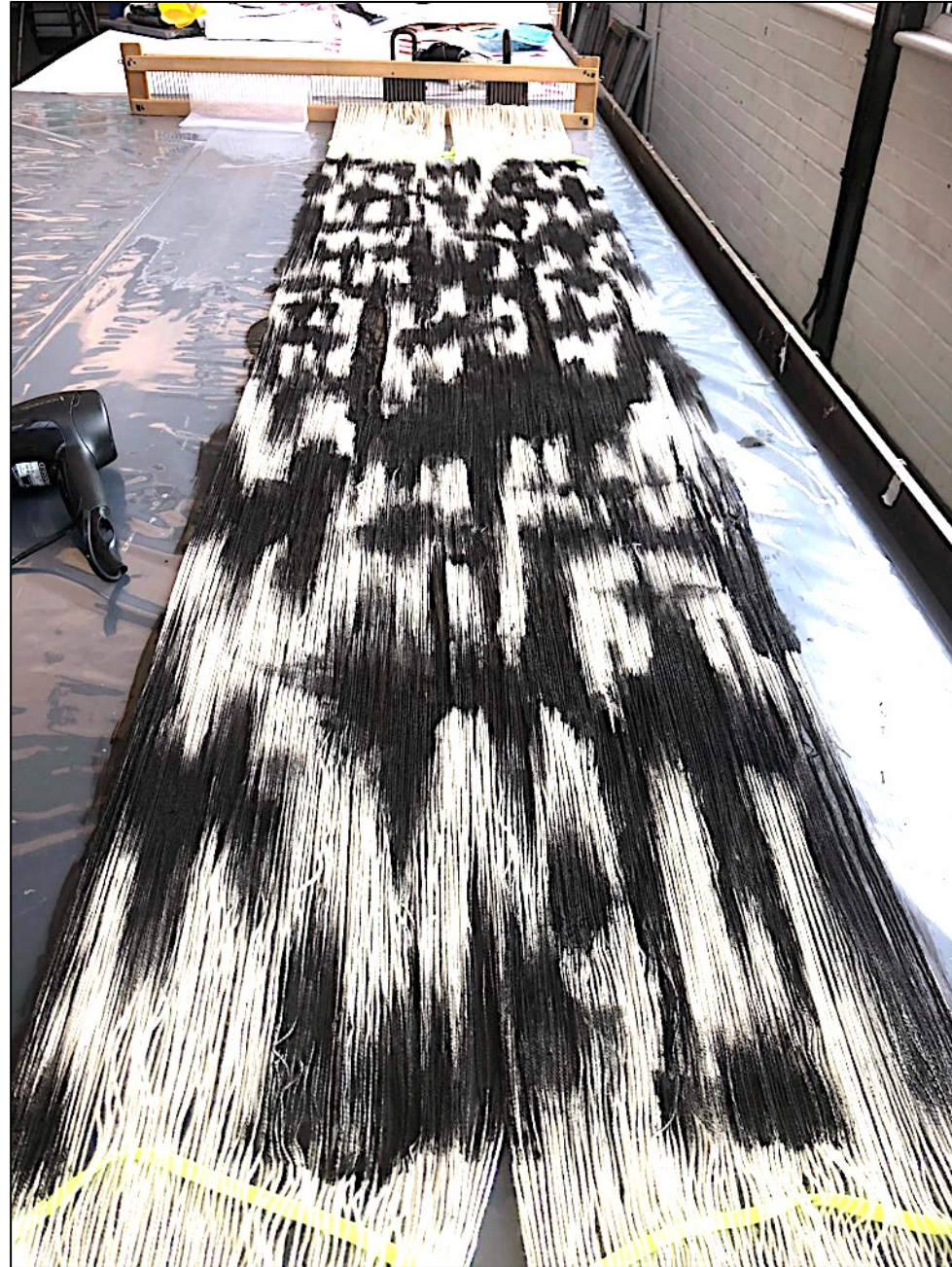
- *“I am who you say I am”*

- This sample is a continuation from *“words stick”* and I have left it as a black and white piece to keep the focus on the mark that was made by the words. *“Self-stigmatization has been defined as the process in which a person with a mental health diagnosis becomes aware of public stigma, agrees with those stereotypes, and internalizes them by applying them to the self”* (Corrigan, Larson, & Kuwabara, 2010).

1<sup>st</sup> Scaled-Up Piece

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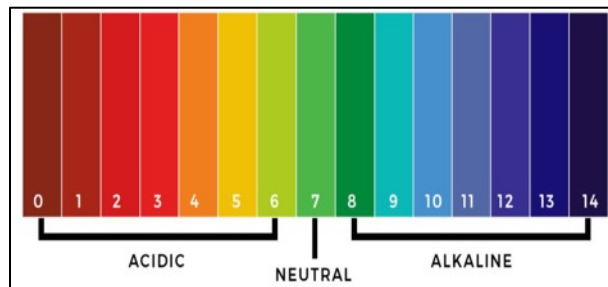
Painting the Warp for the 1<sup>st</sup>  
production sized Piece



## Colour Matching the weft

My initial idea was to have a black and white piece, which would have enabled me to leave the weft yarn undyed. However, as the black had bled onto the white areas, I needed to match the colour to the background. This was harder than I had anticipated. The colour was grey with a hint of pink in it. I had two failed attempts to match the colour, and then I finally got it right on the third attempt – the colour was in fact Kenanthrol Brown SGR 1%

My victory was short lived when most of the colour washed out of the yarn after the dyeing process. I discovered that this was due to the water being very alkaline. After adding citric acid (even though the percentage of dye was low) the colour eventually grabbed onto the fibres and the colour was perfect.



## Weaving – “Your Words Don’t Count”

I was so pleased to have my yarn dyed and everything ready to go. For this piece, I chose to use the ARM Loom as I realised that it would be a long sample and could also become monotonous to weave.



This was definitely one of my better ideas. The ARM Loom is so easy to set up and use. I enjoyed being able to sit down during weaving, and any issues with the design of the pattern were easily rectified using the laptop.



I began and ended the piece with an Italian Hemstitch. This was to hold the weaving in place and also to frame and finish the work. I was pleased that I did this because it looked really effective, and I have decided to finish all of my work in this way for this project.

The weaving itself was very slow although the loom is so good. I couldn't get into any sort of rhythm because the wool on the warp had slightly felted because of the process it had undergone for the dyeing. The fibres kept grabbing onto the wool in my bobbin, which made it impossible to throw the shuttle. Fortunately, the fabric that was made didn't look felted or like it had excess fluff or bobbles.



It was long winded to weave this piece, but I am very satisfied with the outcome. Although the colours are more subtle than the black and white, I had planned, I still think that they work, and they can still be used as a metaphor for the way that the words of someone with a mental illness are often wiped away and pushed aside through stigma.

## The Finishing Process



Final Outcome – “Your Words Don’t Count”

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Woven Textile Designer



"Your Words Don't Count" in  
the Foyer Gallery @ U.C.A  
Farnham



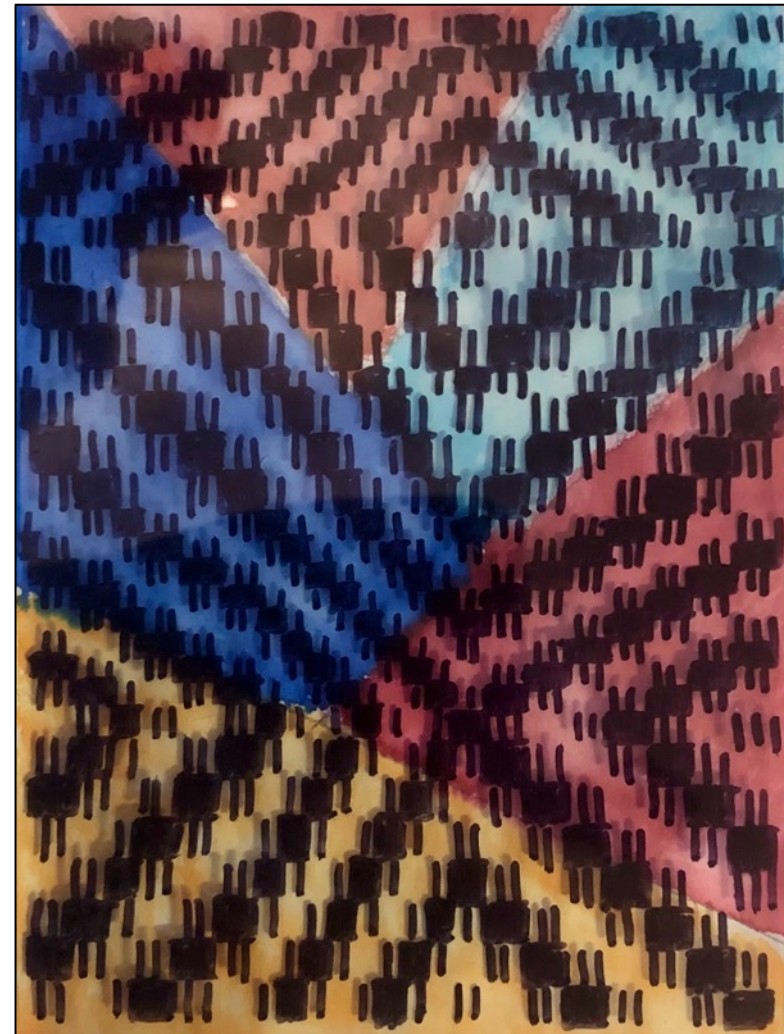
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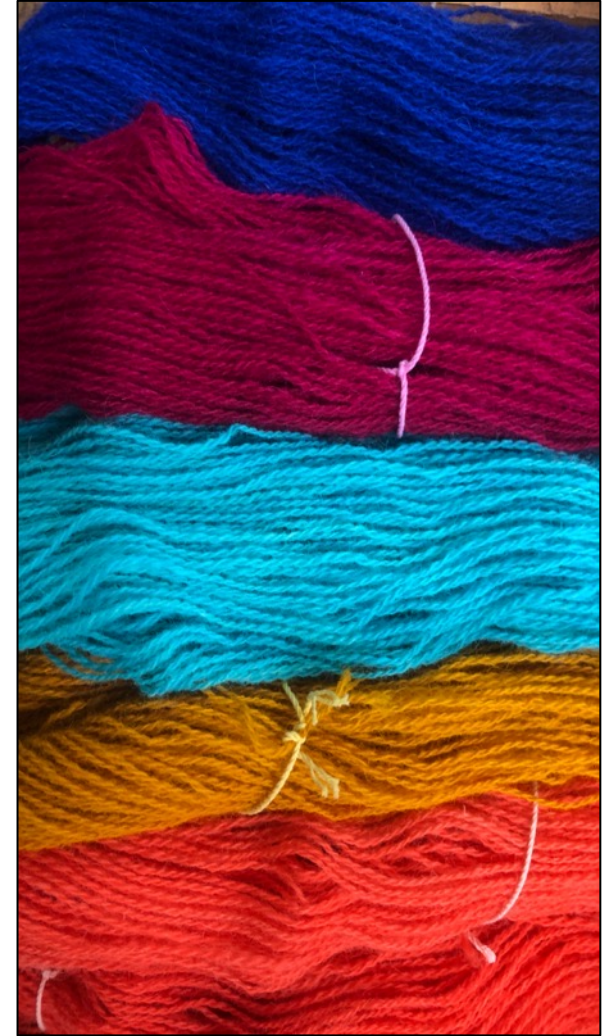
2<sup>nd</sup> Scaled-Up Piece

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# Cartooning for 2<sup>nd</sup> production sized Piece – Colour Blocking



Dyeing in the lab



## The Lags

For this final piece, I decided to enlarge the overshot pattern that I have been using instead of repeating it as I did in the previous production sized piece. As the piece is 65cm wide, it was necessary for me to use a Dobby Loom and the size of the scaled-up pattern meant that there was a very large draft. I decided to divide my lags into two so it would be easier to work with them. This was a good idea because even divided in two, they were really long. I had to put two extra pieces onto the arm at the side of my loom, and the construction reached to the ceiling



## Colour Blocking using paper mock-ups and Fabric Pens

This slide is to show the paper mock-ups that I made to help me get the colour blocking in the right places on the warp. I found a pen which can be used on fabric and disappears in air over time. It was a good idea and worked really well, however, as the warp was under tension, the pattern would shrink when the sample was taken off the loom. This had to be factored into the equation and I wondered if I needed to add to the length. Louise reminded me in a tutorial that as my weft was wool, it would probably shrink more than the warp during finishing, which would balance it out



## The Finishing Process



Once I had made sure that all the threads were sewn back into the sample, I soaked it in warm water for an hour. The sample was then rolled in a towel to make sure that it was damp and ready for the tenter frame.

## The Tenter Frame



My work was placed on the tenter frame after the finishing process. I have included an image of myself next to the work to show the scale

Final Sample – “A Beautiful Mind”

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As the title indicates, this piece is a metaphor for the beauty and complexity of every mind.



"A Beautiful Mind" in the  
Foyer Gallery @ U.C.A  
Farnham



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