



TOUCHING ABSENCE

MA Textiles
Janice Gunner

Touching Absence

Touching Absence, the title I have given to my body of work for the MA, explores the affects on our relationship, following diagnosis of Parkinson's Disease for my husband David. It evokes the sense of him being there, but not being there. The loss of the person who is still very much in the present, but to me, it feels like he is absent. The gradual decline in his thought processes and his memory, and that of the memories we made and are still making together

My first responses were to show the absences as changes in the colour of the thread used for the hand stitching on the first three pieces which are worked in hand dyed, heavy wool serge.

My second response was to include a gradation of colour in my work, and to use a variety of lighter weight, hand dyed fabrics I love colour but in this case the light, medium and dark colours represent David's fading memories, together with the memories we made and shared in the past.

My third response was to depict the absences by leaving empty apertures in the layout presentation of small haptic cushions, made again from a variety of hand dyed fabrics, which are displayed in a vintage print drawer. To allow interaction with the textures and relate these to emotions by the feel and handling of the pieces, which can be replaces were ever the viewer sees fit into the drawer

Janice Gunner 2020





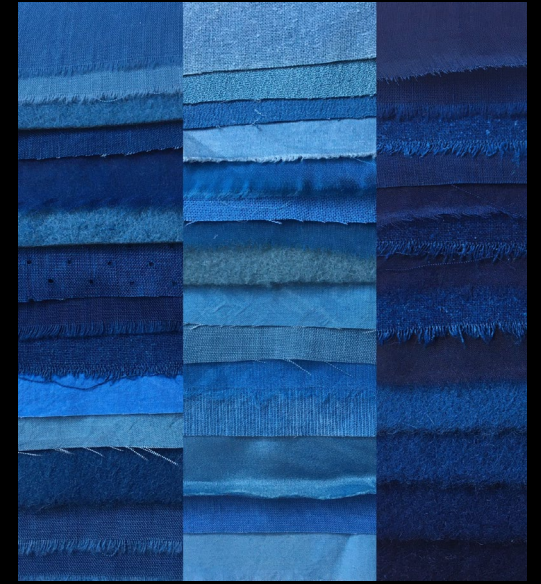
Research

My research focus during the course has been Natural Dyeing. I have experimented with a wide variety of dyes to gain a huge range of colours on fabric, both with protein and cellulose fibres.

I have been surprised by the wide range of colours I have been able to achieve, from the palest hues, to deep rich colours and sometimes from the same dye bath.

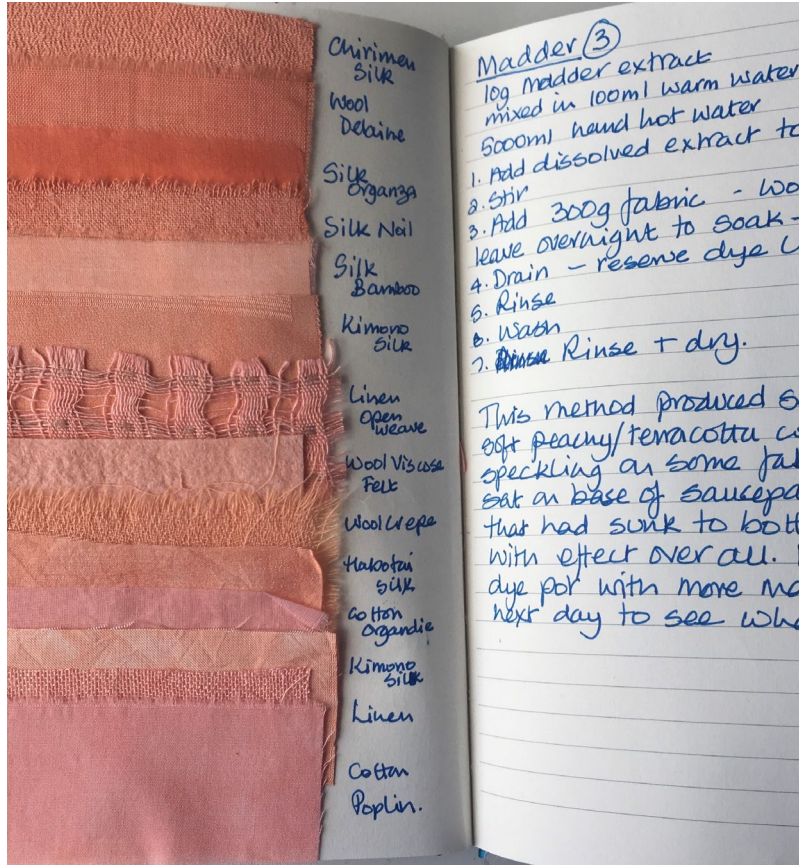
I have dyed with Indigo and Woad for many years, however, during the course I have taught myself to work with dye extracts, liquid dyes, dried plants and fresh plant matter and berries. I also experimented with protein dye attractants and colour modifiers.

I also like to visit exhibitions not only to be inspired by the work on show but to have time to wander and take in the ambience of the place. I admire the work Paul Klee, Sean Scully and Barbara Rae, however, there are many more whose work I like, far too many to mention here but it is interesting how these particular artists have influenced my colour palette. Recent exhibition visits have included We Will Walk at The Turner Contemporary, Picasso and Paper at the RA and Kimono: From Kyoto to Catwalk at the V&A



Natural Dyeing

Dyeing in progress and some of the results I have achieved, including exhaust dyeing of some colours and the addition of dye/colour modifiers such as iron.



Some of my dyeing record books, I filled three in total, as you can see by the bulging pages!



Sketchbook pages

Those who know me, know I rarely sketch before I make work. I make notes in a journal and might make a few scrappy sketches, but I prefer to work straight from the fabric or design source. If necessary, I will make patterns or diagrams with dimensions to follow.

Just after lockdown ended for vulnerable people (I have asthma so had been shielding) I was introduced, by Cas Holmes to observational drawing using flowers. As I had been doing lots of gardening to get some fresh air during this time, I used some the plants I had grown to do this.





Collage

I filled 5 A6 tiny sketch books, 20 pages per book

- Made over the course of 100 days during the Covid-19 lockdown, one every day.
- Some are torn paper, some are cut, I used a lot of Khadi paper that I dyed with indigo several years ago, as well as magazine cuttings and Japanese paper.
- I loved doing these, they were just out of my head, no specific theme!



More Collage

I signed up for an online class on making Matisse style Collages. Here are some, including two using up the left-overs!



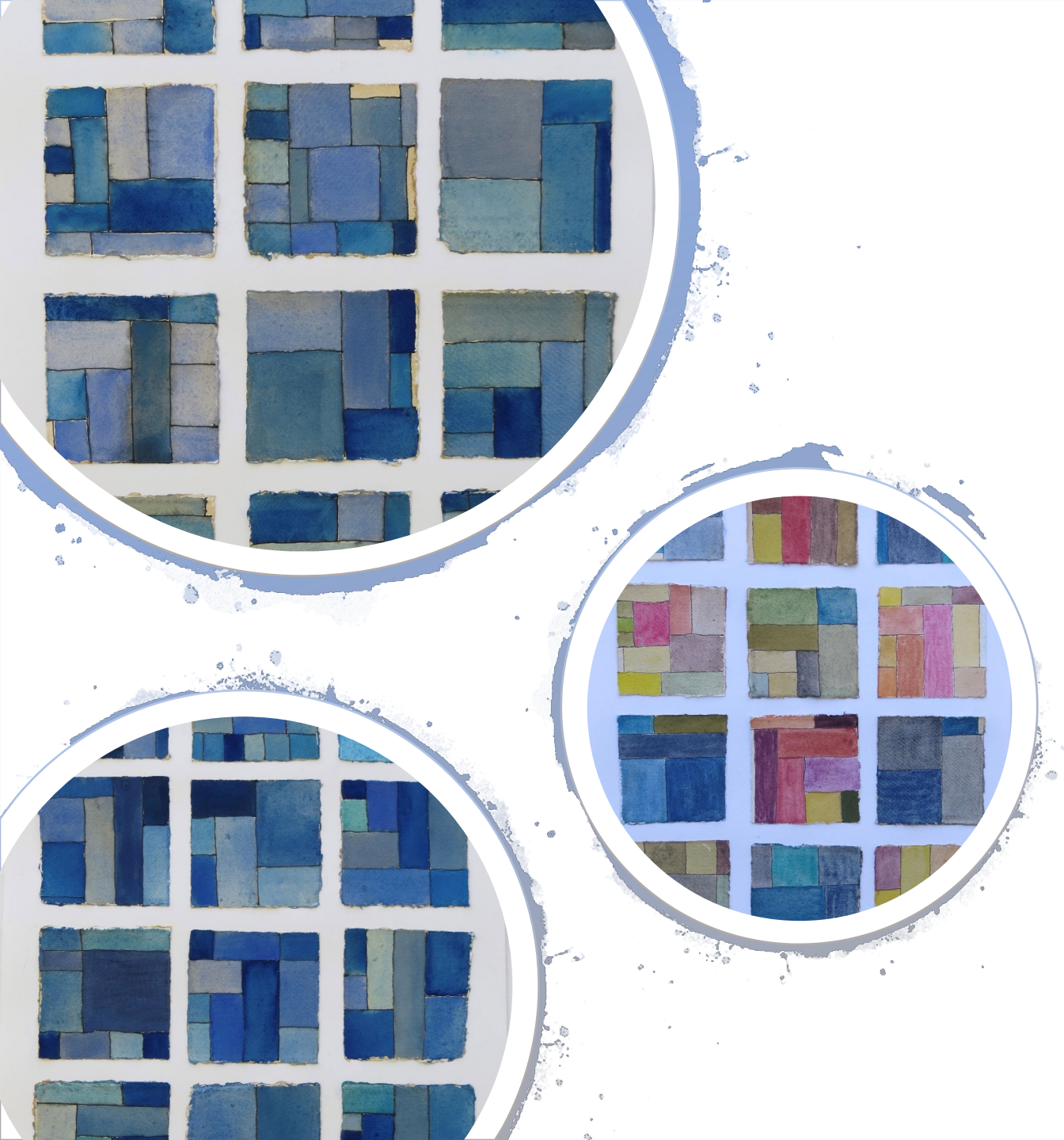
Colour Studies

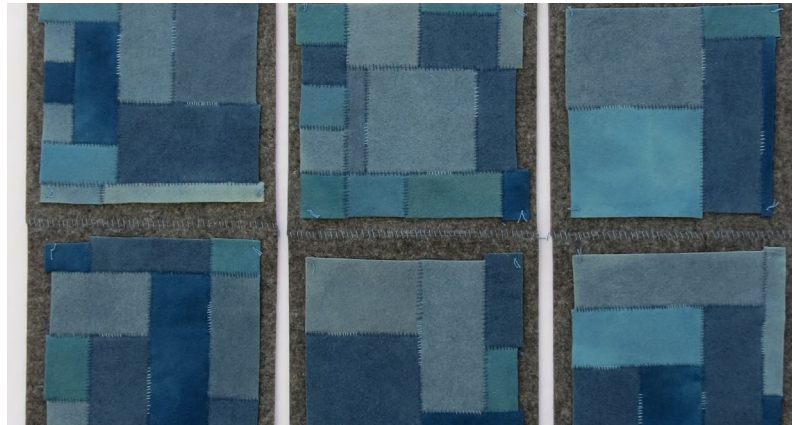
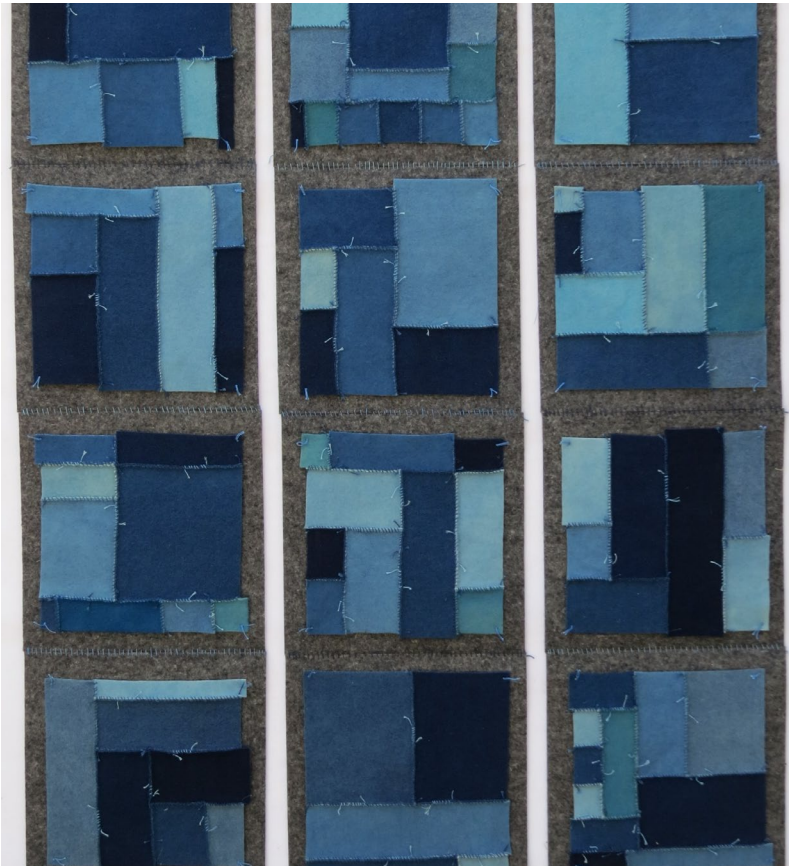
Touching Absence 1,2,& 3

I hand painted 10 cm squares of Khadi paper after drawing in the block designs with a fine marker pen.

Touching Absence 1 (on the left) was painted with Derwent 'Inktense' blocks, Touching Absence 2 & 3 were painted with Koh-I-Noor paints. Once dry they were stuck onto A2 sheets of paper.

These gave me a rough idea of colour placement when I came to cut the fabric for the blocks. I used hand dyed Wool Serge for all three of these pieces





Touching Absence – The Work



Touching Absence 1

As I mentioned before, this body of work explores the affect of Parkinson's Disease on a relationship, that of my husband David and I. Life for us has changed as we come to terms with a progressive neurological disorder. It is about loss and the associated memory issues and how we learn to deal with it. I describe the situation as an absence. An absence of the man I have known for almost 5 decades, how memories are receding, the person is still here but absent!



Touching Absence 2

Indigo, Woad and Saxon Blue.

A slightly more faded look to express the memories lost and also to soothe the soul. Working this piece had a calming effect on my mood and allowed me time to reflect on what the future holds for us both.

Touching Absence 3

Stronger more vibrant blues were needed to stand up to the tight stitching done on this piece. Two different kinds of Indigo were used. Japanese natural indigo and synthetic 60% grains, some of the wool serge fabric has been dipped up to 4 times to achieve the depth of colour required. I also dyed with woad which is the softer, lighter blue. The turquoise was achieved with Saxon Blue dye.

All of the seams are shown on the right side of this work, They are hard and scratchy, like David's moods sometimes!





Touching Absence 4

Machine pieced in the traditional patchwork method of seams on the wrong side. Using metric measurements I took a 5mm seam to join all the pieces and pressed the seams open so that darker thread did not show on the lighter fabric underneath.

I layered up the quilt top with cotton & polyester wadding and a natural linen backing fabric and spray basted the layers together.

I free machine quilted all over the work with a double, cellular type design, using 50 weight cotton thread. The quilting design alludes to David's former profession, some of which included ground breaking research into rare skin disorders, as a Senior Chief Medical Laboratory Scientist.

I finished the piece with a corded/couched edge so as not to loose any more of the overall size.



Touching Absence 5

Tiny cushions displayed in an old printers drawer with some apertures unfilled to represent absence.

The cushions are for handling. The haptic experience of each cushion is meant to convey and emotion or help to release or stir a memory. They can be put back where the observer wishes!

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Detail images of the Touching Absence Series

These selected images show the work in more detail. Reading clockwise from top right are

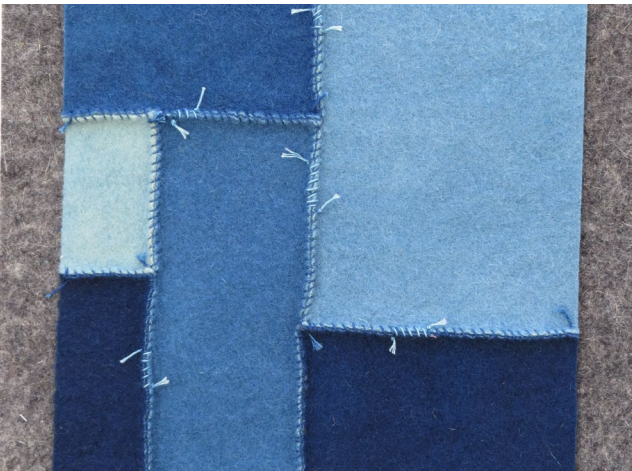
Close up of the quilting on TA 4

Close up of a unit from TA 2

Close up of one of the multi coloured units in TA 1

Close up to show the tighter stitching on a unit from TA 3

Close up of the tiny 5 cm cushions in situ, the old lining paper has been left in the all the apertures to fit with the theme of loss and absence. It is only visible where there is no cushion.





Janice Gunner

MA Textiles

I have been a maker for over 45 years, my work has focused mostly on the Patchwork and Quilting element of textile art. I have exhibited nationally and internationally for at least 25 years of that time and have received prizes for some of my work. I have also been a teacher of Patchwork & Quilting and Textile Arts up to City & Guilds levels since 1988.

I have been awarded a Teacher Scholarship to the USA and more recently, a Travel & Education Bursary by The Quilters' Guild of the British Isles (yet to be taken up). I hold two City & Guilds Medals for Excellence, once as a student and second as a lecturer.

I am the inaugural recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award by the organisers of The Festival of Quilts, a past President and Honorary member of The Quilters Guild of the British Isles.

I am the author of two books, Shibori for Textile Artists and Liberating Log Cabin Patchwork.

I have a specific interest and wide knowledge of traditional Japanese Textile techniques and lead trips to Japan for Arena Travel as one of their textile experts. This year's trip was cancelled due to Covid-19, but I hope to lead a trip in September 2021.

I have been invited to exhibit at The Embassy of Japan in a group exhibition of textile artists inspired by or influenced by Japanese Textile Techniques called 'The Techniques shaping Japanese Textiles' from 28/09/20 – 18/12/20.

In 2022, as part of the group of PhD, Masters and MA students that went with Prof, Lesley Millar, on the study trip to Japan, I will be taking part in 'Tansa – Japanese Threads of Influence' exhibition at The Craft Study Centre, Farnham and Gallery Gallery, Kyoto, Japan.



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