



Claire Barber is an artist and Senior Lecturer in Textile Crafts. Claire graduated from the Royal College of Art in 1994 in Fine Art: Tapestry. Her practice grows from the interconnection between place and the way people are connected to their surrounding environment, predominantly producing site conditional work. Since 2004 Claire has worked extensively with communities affected by environmental and economic change. An Art Plus Development Award (2005) and Art Plus Final Award (2006) enabled her collaboration with RA Webb and production of *You Are the Journey* within the context of the Hythe to Southampton Ferry commute. While in 2009 she was awarded 'Place Space and Identity II', which prompted the development of an interactive artwork on the North Staffordshire bus network. Currently she is completing The Weymouth Relief Road Project, in collaboration with land artist Richard Harris in preparation for 2012 Olympics.

Claire has received numerous commissions and residencies both nationally and internationally. Commissions include *Land and the Samling* commissioned for Kielder Water by The Samling Foundation (2002), *Stepping Lightly on 88 Pillows* commissioned for Westonbirt Arboretum and King Johns Palace, Southampton (2002-8), *The River Severn Project* and residency presented by the Oriel Davies Gallery (2004) and *Quilting the Estuary* publication and residency funded through Cywaith Cymru's residency scheme (2006-07).

Her interest in the fusion of traditional and contemporary textile production was explored during the *Through the Surface* project and exchange in Kyoto with participation in a supporting website, catalogue and touring exhibition with venues including The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts and The Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto (2003-05). Recent textile based installation has been presented at the Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University, Beijing as part of *From Lausanne to Beijing 5th International Fiber Art Biennale* (2008).

Claire's approach to making is to question the nature of 'where is the work' while she is engaged in time between process and completion. She is intimately responsive to the notion of site and its occupants. Claire has created work in response to numerous commission briefs and residencies which has informed her practice through dialogue with members of the public, project directors, curators, and various funding bodies such as the Arts Council. This multiplicity of contexts has meant that collaboration and the exchange of ideas have become innate in her practice.

In 2002 The Sampling Foundation presented a project titled *'Land and the Sampling'*. Claire was one of five artists chosen to participate in the project and to develop a temporary artwork during a month long residency at Kielder Forest, Northumberland. David Butler, the author of the *'Land and the Sampling'* writes of Claire's textile innovations.

"The route of the old railway line emerges from the northern shore of Kielder Water and continues north across the border of Scotland. This was one of the paths that Barber cycled, trailing behind her a large wooden roller wrapped with wool. As the roller dragged along roads and forest paths the wool matted into felt. This is the oldest way to make textiles – pounding on dampened fibres until they mat together. It seems so stupidly simple it could never work but the felted wool is both strong and supple and wonderfully soft."

During a three month exchange in Japan, working alongside textile practitioner Teruyoshi Yoshida, Claire lived and worked in Harumi Isobe's studio in the suburbs of Kyoto. Claire's combined interest in illusion and utilising the aesthetic value of reclaimed objects began to subvert the traditional notions of craft. The subsequent exhibition in 2004 *'Through the Surface'* was a collaborative exhibition of textile artists from Britain and Japan.

The director Lesley Millar writes of Claire's exploration of the relationship between the textual and textile as a complex project, operating on several fronts in and around Kyoto. While in Japan Claire began to rethink her relationship between self, performance and materiality. She was particularly influenced by the Japanese attention to delicacy and detail within their customs, whether this was a tea party or a puppet show. Presented against a mountain backdrop, the notion of summoning a collective ritual started to evolve in her work. In 2005 an Art Plus Development Award was instrumental in bringing her and the painter RA Webb together for the first time to work as Barber and Webb. The award provided an opportunity to increase their skills and to establish Barber and Webb as a successful collaboration. On receiving a Final Art Plus Award in 2006, Barber and Webb re-designed the Hythe Ferry Ten Journey Ticket as a focus for reflection, combining the

functionality of the ticket with an interactive public artwork; where the tickets are clipped creating an opportunity to place commuters thoughts and comments. The results wove complex social patterns and ephemeral poetry onto each ticket which were gradually erased throughout the week by the daily punch hole.

The approach was continued in 2008 during *'Place Space and Identity II'* a commission which enabled Claire to work with a much wider and broader audience. Inspired by a large burger company's advertising campaign using thermo chromic inks, Claire used the same technology to create a bus ticket upon which the warmth of human touch from passengers' hands revealed new layers of text from the ticket surface. It also presented a new way to explore a non expressive and intuitive approach to tracing human touch in time. Two batches of 367,000 tickets were released on the *First Group* fleet of buses leaving the Hanley and Adderley Green depot in Stoke-on-Trent. A bus ticket may seem a modest and rather throwaway space for a public artwork. However it is the ticket's facility to reach so many individuals on a very immediate and human level during their journey that fascinated Claire. As a ticket is bought, handled, stuffed into a purse or back pocket it presents a discreet level of human intimacy contrasting with the mechanical functionality of the ticket as artefact.

Claire is an artist, whose working method touches people's everyday lives, asking them to record their individual thoughts and experiences and then using the accumulated material to make a visual intervention about their understanding of place. A stretch of the Weymouth Relief Road is currently being built through the community of Littlemoor, Dorset in preparation for the 2012 Olympics. Again Claire has collected the thoughts and feelings of those living in the area to challenge her preconceptions of a community linked and simultaneously divided through the construction of a new road. After a period of consultation with Littlemoor community members, road builders/engineers and Dorset County Councillors, Claire subsequently developed an interactive artwork entitled *'Littlemoor Wishes'*. The work consisted of printed instruction, tie clips and three laser cut neoprene tags contained in a small transparent clip-seal bag that were individually posted to all 2400 Littlemoor households in 2009. A pen was also provided for people to hand write their own wishes, desires, protests or hopes, with instructions to tie them onto the metal Herris fencing surrounding the Relief Road works. The response was that within a short space of time huge clusters of brightly coloured tags were seen fluttering on the Herris fencing against a moving backdrop of road building.

Claire Barber

resident social journey

