



School: School of Design

Researcher: Rachael Howard

Project Title: Red Work and Wit of The Stitch

UOA: 32 - Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory

300-Word Statement

The catalyst for this portfolio was a Redwork quilt in 'American Beauty', an exhibition of American 19th Century craft at the American Museum in 2009. Inspired by their simple linear depictions of everyday life, in newly affordable red thread, they appeared as an instagram of their time. Howard explored the possibilities of these traditional techniques to create a new series of textile works for her solo touring exhibition *Red Work* in 2014 at the Waterside, Manchester and subsequently *Wit of the Stitch* in 2016, Ruthin Craft Centre, Wales. Howard's research asks 3 questions:

1. Can the techniques of *Red Work* be updated to contribute to contemporary storytelling?
2. Can embroidery act as a communication tool to express socio political and cultural values?
3. What is the potential of drawing and digital processes within embroidery to forge new kinds of image making?

Red Work (2014) featured framed textile works and objects, together with 2 large immersive wall hangings, with an accompanying sound element, created from multiple, red and blue stitched, autobiographical sketches of daily life, sequenced as in the 1880s Red Work quilts. Combining experimental printing processes with traditional Red Work techniques, gestural marks from notes, doodles, and children's drawings are elevated and enlarged to become the landscapes for her narratives. Exhibiting with 7 other international textile artists in *Wit of the Stitch* (2016), 4 new commissions extended these methods further, focusing on the capture of observed behaviours to find new ways of expressing contemporary narratives. *Red Work* was the basis for a symposium *Textile Matters* hosted at BSU in 2016.

Reinterpreting the history of figurative textiles, and keeping drawing central to her practice, Howard presents a lo fi permanence, in stitch, to the transience of curated contemporary life and opens up new accessible ways of communicating information about ourselves.