

Possum News

The Quarterly Newsletter for Kurrara Designus



April 2016: Issue #2

This Issue

- How nature can inspire textile art
- Adventures in Natural Dyeing
- Gelli plate printing on paper
- Project: Raw edge appliqué cup coaster or mug mat
- Workshop News
- Diary of Events



Next Issue (Jul 16)

- The Art of Free-Machine Embroidery
- Working With the Brother ScanNCut
- Project: Quick and Easy Greetings Card
- Workshop News
- Diary of Events

Introduction to Possum News

Hi Everyone,

Welcome to the second edition of Possum News

First of all, I would like to say a big thank you to everyone who responded so favourably to the first edition of my new newsletter. I have been extremely encouraged by your feedback and your comments are very much appreciated. My thanks go also to my lovely students who came to my first series of Fibre Reactive dye workshops over the last few months. They came from near and far and inspired me with their enthusiasm and imagination. We got to play with colour mixing, shades, tones and tints, thickened dyes, shaving foam and a Gelli plate, creating metres of plain and patterned fabrics, some of which are shown above.

In case you're not familiar with Gelli plate printing, it's a form of monoprinting, that you can do without a machine press and it's a great tool to use with Procion MX dyes. You can use it to print on paper, which is a good way to start out and I've included a short introductory article on how to use one in this current issue. Also in this issue I've focussed on the natural world for inspiration and design ideas and for anyone who enjoys free-machine embroidery, there's a quick and easy teacup coaster project for you to try out.

Contact

Tina Whiteley
(03) 5989 2083
0417 352 713
tina@kurraradesigns.com.au

I hope you enjoy this newsletter and if there are any special topics you would like me to include in future editions, please do let me know and I look forward to bringing you more ideas and articles in a few months' time.

Tina Whiteley

How Nature Can Inspire Textile Art

“If you truly love nature, you will find beauty everywhere.”

Vincent van Gogh

Nature as a source of inspiration for the visual arts has a long tradition, dating back to the cave paintings of prehistoric times. As civilisations became more settled and cultured, the visual arts, including textile arts, thrived. There are many examples of paintings, tapestries, clothing and homewares that have been inspired by animals, plants, rock formations, water and other natural phenomena. They formed a decorative and spiritual connection between man and nature. Textiles until recent times, were either made up of animal or plant fibres and were coloured using dyes derived from plants, minerals or invertebrates, which automatically connected them to the natural world.

Sometimes in ancient textiles we see nature represented in a realistic way and sometimes images are abstracted with various natural motifs used symbolically or stylistically to tell a story. Flowers and animals, real



and mythological are often featured in Chinese embroideries, Japanese kimonos and Islamic carpets or rugs, as stylised, repeated designs. Sometimes we see a single motif used as a starting point to build up more intricate patterns, as in woodblock printing.

India was well known for its use of woodblock colour printing, which still thrives today, drawing on various natural images, such as peacocks and



elephants. In this process, the pattern is repeated by carefully stamping the inked block across the entire length of the cloth to give an overall design or pattern.

In Europe, during the 17th and 18th Centuries, imported Indian floral chintz fabric was very popular for clothing and homewares.

Influenced by Asian and Islamic textiles and ceramics, William Morris' acanthus and pomegranate motifs

are famous examples of repeat designs used in his tapestry and furnishing fabrics.

Both the Arts and Crafts Movement and the later Art Nouveau style looked to nature for its organic shapes and lines. Both movements were reacting against the ever growing industrialisation of Europe and America and their designs were inspired by a romantic and nostalgic view of a natural world that was fast disappearing. This changed to a certain extent with the advent of Art Deco and Bauhaus styles, as they celebrated all things modern, streamlined and technological, preferring to look to the future than the past, and embracing consumerism. However, the natural world was still reflected in a number of designs.

Today we are moving back towards the natural again, with concerns about the environment and how it is being affected by mass consumerism on a global scale. Eco textiles are gaining in popularity, whereby natural fibres and cloth are recycled, dyed naturally and repurposed, using hand and machine sewing and embellishment techniques, with the emphasis on the slow and methodical process.

As textile artists we are more aware of looking after the environment, being kinder in our working practices, using less water in dyeing and not using hazardous chemicals that can cause problems with disposal or create health issues. We are doing things in a more considered way and in particular we are not always focussed on the end result. We also savour the processes of design and making as outcomes in themselves, for how they make us feel, improving our wellbeing, skills and knowledge.

Most of my inspiration comes from just looking out the window at the bushland around me and I am drawn to create more natural organic designs. I love the natural bush landscape, but each of us is different and maybe you are inspired more by the beach or even by urban landscapes.

The processes I talk about below can be equally applied to those scenes. I just want to highlight a few alternative ways that we can approach textile design that can sometimes help us see things in a new light and get our creative mojo juices flowing!

Pattern Repeats

No matter where you look in nature you will see some sort of motif or pattern that can be used as a springboard for your own design. What might start out as a very recognisable image, such as a forest of trees, can very easily be abstracted to a repeat pattern that can prove

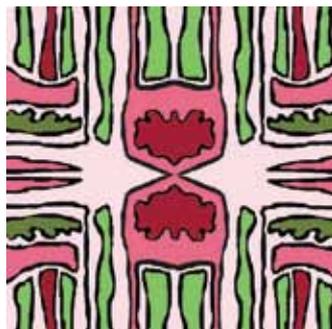
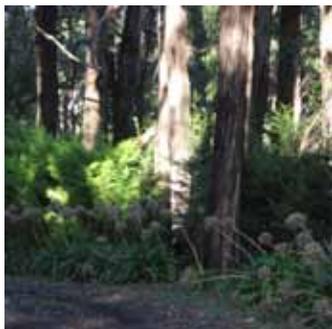
ideal for a quilt block or an intricate embroidery. Something that starts out quite organic, can look quite geometric when made into a tiled pattern. Depending on the colours and shapes you use, it may be ideal for an ethnic or tribal design.

Here I've used Photoshop to create a repeat tile

pattern, but it can also be done manually with squares of tracing paper and white paper which can then be copied and arranged into a design you like. Each tile could be used as a template to cut out appliqué pieces to make into a quilt block, or sections could be painted or dyed and then over stitched with hand

or machine embroidery. The more you repeat the pattern, the more intricate the design becomes.

More detailed instructions will be available on the website tutorials page next month if you would like to try making your own repeat patterns.



Replicating Interesting Characteristics

Another way you could use nature to create your own design would be to really study a leaf, a flower head, or a rock and take notice of the intricacies of that object. For example, are the markings

or shapes regular or irregular? Are the colours of all the parts of that object the same or do they vary in tone or hue? What is their texture - do they have indentations? Are they rough or smooth to touch? One of the beauties of textiles is that they are so tactile and we can often translate the texture of an item by using a suitable fibre, such as felt or silk to portray its significant characteristics. Sometimes it's only when we have a bit of time to really observe something that we get inspired by a

new aspect of it that we haven't noticed before.



Pine trees, for example, have significantly different bark patterns along their trunks which could be the basis for an exploration of pattern and texture, using various

materials. Options could include taking bark rubbings on fabric or paper with crayons or oil sticks and stitching over the top for a 2D representation. Wet or dry needle felting could be a good way to build up a 3D version, emphasising the ribbed and uneven woody texture. Another option would be pleating and stitching a sheer fabric with good draping qualities to replicate the folds and ridges in the bark, which could then be painted and stiffened to give another 3D design.



Using items from nature in your artwork

You could even try stitching or working with the natural object if it lends itself to that process, such as shells, dry leathery leaves or seed pods. They could be painted or waxed and made into beads or necklaces. It's really as limitless as your imagination.

We had a flowering gum in the garden, which has now gone to that great bushland in the sky, but I managed to save a number of the large seedpods, which are waiting in a bag in the shed to be drilled out and painted, so that I can then hang them up in the studio.

Eco or natural dyeing is another example of using nature itself in your work. Each print that you make on your fabric



using a leaf, a flower or a seed head will be unique and can then inform your stitching or added mark-making if you want to do more printing or embellishing over the top.

Sometimes, just the simple print is enough

and piecing lots of different naturally-dyed fabrics together can make a stunning quilt or piece of wearable art.

Different perspectives

Sometimes it can be good to tackle something from a different perspective.

For example, you could photograph a tree or bush from underneath and see what effect the sunlight has on the leaves and notice the contrast of colours and tones.



Do some leaves appear to be transparent and some opaque due to the light falling on them? Perhaps you could translate that into a textile work, using layers of sheer or iridescent fabrics.

Looking up into trees you can see how the lines move diagonally towards the centre, so you could have a circular design with converging lines and contrasting shapes and sizes that would make an ideal study for a confetti-type quilt.

If you are able to manipulate your photos on the computer with photo ed-

iting software, such as Photoshop, or Paintshop Pro, you can get some unusual effects that would translate well into a textile design. For example, this image was pretty



flat to start with and I tried different art filters on Photoshop and also played up the purples and pinks by slightly changing the hues to make it a bit more interesting. This image could then be the basis for a 3D free-machine embroidered design. You don't always have to keep the original colours or even the shapes. Your photos are really a starting point and it's fun to see how far you can push them.

Changing the perspective of an object is another way to create abstraction. Here are two images of water. The first one is rather more traditional and the second is more abstract in appearance.

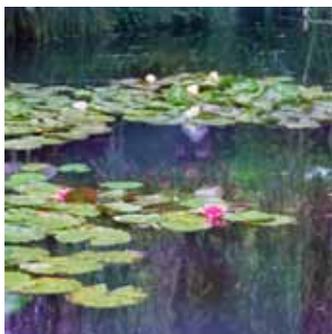


Both have the added dimension of motion, but the abstract one below, lends itself to many more interesting interpretations. It was a picture of a waterfall shot from underneath, so it's a bit of a different take on moving water. There are lots of horizontal and vertical elements that could make for quite a dramatic design. Water is generally a great starting point for textile art designs. There are many aspects that can be explored, from the way it moves to the way it reflects light and objects.



While I was staying in Giverny last year, I went to Monet's Garden several times and, of course, fell in love with the lily pond. I took a lot of photos and also did some sketches as visual references and emotional triggers. Inspired by the garden, one of the items I was itching to make when I got back home was a machine embroidered shawl, which I finally finished late last year.

I wanted to capture the movement of the water and its gorgeous turquoise and aqua colours. There were so many reflections from the



flowers around the pond that produced flecks of pink, orange, purple and yellow in the water. I captured this with various yarns flecked with those colours and combined textures and thicknesses, laying them out to get that gentle swaying effect of the water. I tried to capture the fragility of the water

lilies using hand-dyed silk for both the leaves and the flowers that sit on top of the shawl.

For me it was also about reliving the experience of being at Giverny and the tranquillity of feeling the warmth of the sun, watching the leaves swaying in the breeze and hearing the birds overhead.



Designing and putting the shawl together brought it all back to me, which made the whole process even more enjoyable.

If you are interested in finding out more about the techniques used in making this shawl, please visit the Textile Talk section on the website.

There are many ways that Nature can inspire us, but the key is to capture the essence of it. Think about what makes it so special for you and how you can portray that aspect in your work.

What makes the work unique to you will be the way you interpret that essence, whether it's something that has touched you from an emotional, spiritual, aesthetic or other sensory perspective.

I hope I've given you a few different ways of looking at things and also hope you get the chance to try out some of them down the track.

Adventures In Natural Dyeing

The ability to dye fabric using nature's own resources opens up a door to a new world that enables you to explore boundaries that are only set by your imagination and desire for adventure. As with all good adventures, when you start out you are happy to take the popular route, but as you get more into your journey, you want to go "off-road" and start finding your own way.

Every time you stretch yourself, you set out on a new journey of discovery that will often end in results you had not even imagined achieving at the start. Allow me to take you on my journey of adventure

into natural dyeing.

It first started about 8 years ago when I did an eco dyeing workshop with India Flint. There we learned the techniques of boiling up eucalyptus leaves to give earthy coloured liquids that became our dyebaths. We also learned to wrap various leaves in silk fabrics and bundle them, so that they made an imprint on the fabric when they were simmered in the dyebaths.

In the early days I was thrilled to bits with any colour stain or blob that appeared on the silk. I used mainly silk offcuts to add into my machine embroidered scarves and, if there was a

recognisable leaf imprint, then I was in raptures! The excitement of opening those first small bundles was fantastic and I must admit I am still just as excited today when I open up my newly-dyed bundles of scarves, clothing, or metres of fabric. The difference now is that I am much more daring in my dyeing practice and also more demanding in my results.



As time went on I wanted to dye bigger pieces of silk and explore natural dyeing possibilities with other sorts of fabrics, such as wool and cotton, all of which came with different sets of challenges and problems to solve. It involved a lot of reading, research and experimentation, which I loved.

The one thing I was not so good at initially was note-taking – that wasn't so exciting! After a while, however, it was obvious that I had to start keeping records, as I would forget a lot of what I did and was hard-pressed to identify what leaves or dyebaths I'd used, even after just a few weeks.

It became more important as time went on, when I started to dye fabrics and scarves commercially for other people and for various shops and galleries. For me, this was uncharted territory, so note taking took on a new significance, in that it formed part of my research and development to improve and streamline my professional practice and overall results.



I devised record sheets that could be easily replicated and completed by hand. They provided the means to try out comparison dyeing, whereby I could vary cooking and curing times, heat settings, mordants, pH values and different wrapping methods, to see which outcomes gave the results I wanted. These were all things I'd never thought of doing at the beginning, but which I now do as a matter of course. They have served me well, to give me much clearer and more colourful prints on both protein and cellulose fabrics.

For the last few years I have given talks at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Cranbourne on my

experiences with natural dyeing. Doing that has taken me down new and exciting paths. As part of the first year's talk I took on the challenge of experimenting with a number of the Gardens' specimen plants to see what colours they would yield and was delighted with some of the results. It was a great way to learn about the value of Australian natives, especially eucalyptus varieties, not only for dyeing, but also for their medicinal purposes. I now have a greater respect for these wonderful trees.

As a direct result of the association with Cranbourne Gardens, I have become fascinated with the history of dyes and indeed the origins of textiles.

For those of you who may be interested there is some information on the history of dyes on the website textile talks and I hope to bring you more information on these topics in later newsletters.

I began to explore the colour possibilities of new plants in my garden and created a palette of subtle colour wheel shaded threads by using a method of dyeing called solar or cramjar dyeing.



Plant material is left to soak in jars of water and the heat of the sun does most of the work to extract the colour.

It was a great learning experience, watching the threads absorb the coloured liquids as they were placed in the jars and then later oxidise and change colour again when they were removed.



I've made my first two naturally-dyed quilts, which I've embellished with hand and machine stitch. I've learned that I love making them and can't wait to get the time to create some new designs. I've dyed silk wall hangings and fabrics



for framing, which have been featured in a joint exhibition and I will be exhibiting naturally-dyed work in future art shows, which again is something I'd never have dreamed of doing when I first started.



Most of all I love teaching what I do. To share my knowledge and help people to learn to dye their own fabrics and threads is the best part of the journey for me. I have the opportunity to give demos and workshops and meet lovely like-minded people.

If you've ever been curious about natural dyeing, do give it a try as it's such a rewarding pursuit and the more you do it the more things you will want to try until it really gets you hooked.

Take those first steps and you never know where it might lead you!

Please visit Kurrara Designs Facebook page to see more examples of naturally dyed fabrics



Gelli Plate Printing On Paper

Gelli plate printing is a way of monoprinting (ie making a one-off print) without using a mechanical printing press. It's ideal for the hobby crafter as it takes up much less space and is not nearly as expensive to buy as a printing press!

The cheapest option is to make your own gelatine plate, or you can buy one which is a little more expensive, but it is more robust.

I prefer to use a commercial one, as I've made gelatine plates in the past and did not relish the thought of having to reheat and reshape homemade ones, that went mouldy or cracked up!

The commercial version is a flexible transparent polymer plate on which you create your design with paints, inks or dyes. A piece of paper or fabric is placed over the top, gently pressed down and pulled off, revealing the one-off design.



Sometimes there is some residual colour left on the plate, which can yield a second print, but it will be much paler and slightly different to the first print. The commercial plates can cost from about \$20 to \$50 depending on the shape and size.

What do I need for Gelli plate printing?

Along with the plate, you'll need various tools, such as paint or ink rollers, otherwise known as brayers, which come in small medium and large sizes. You'll need paints, clean up cloths, paper (thin deli type paper, copy paper, card or watercolour paper are fine) and plastic sheeting or newspaper to protect your work surface. As you get more used to working with a Gelli plate you can add things like stencils and masks for extra interest.

When printing on paper you can use any acrylic paint. If printing on fabric that will be washed, you then need to add a textile medium to the acrylic paints or use dyes if you don't want to alter the handle of the fabric.

We'll just be looking at working with paper this time, as it's a much quicker process than working with fabric and if you're new to it, it's a much

easier way of getting started and getting used to using the Gelli plate.

How do I get started?

Start by "inking" up your plate. By that I mean putting a few blobs of paint on the plate and gently rolling them all over the surface to cover it with a thin, smooth layer of colour. Don't overdo it with paint – a very little goes a long way and if it's too thick you don't get great prints. A nice thin covering is ideal – so that it almost looks transparent.



You can roller one or several colours over the plate and then place the paper over the top and pull a print. You may find that the plate is pretty clean afterwards, or there might still be colour left on it, so you can either remove it with a clean brayer, which will take off any remaining paint, or pull another print. Have some spare waste paper to hand, to clean your brayer in between rolling.

Textures

When you've tried a simple one or two colour



print, you can have some fun with textures. Roller paint onto the plate and then take some Glad Wrap, press it onto the plate and slightly scrunch it. When you lift off the film, you'll have a creased texture on your plate that will translate well onto paper, as in the example above.

Try using bubble wrap, netting or hessian and pressing them on top of an inked plate and see what different textures you can create. These make great backgrounds for collage, scrapbooking, making cards or work.

Stencils and Masks

You can buy or make your own stencils and masks for use on the Gelli plate to create more depth to your prints. A stencil will let the colour come through the cut or open part of a design and a mask (the inverse of a stencil) will protect a design by covering it. You can add another colour around the outside of it with-

out affecting the original design.

You can cut your own stencils in acetate by hand, but having a die cutting machine, such as a Sizzix or an electronic cutting machine like the Brother ScanNCut, makes it much easier and quicker.



In the above example, I used blue and green acrylic paints on the plate and rolled them to give a slight variation at the horizon line. From there I placed a tree stencil on the plate and then rolled a brown paint mix of red, yellow and blue over the top. When I removed the stencil the brown tree sat on top of the background.

In this next example, I used several stencilled layers in different colours for the background and let each layer dry before rolling the next layer on top. The final layer before pulling the print was left wet.

I took a print of the back-



I then did a new stencil in black and when the first print was completely dry, I placed it back over the plate and pulled another print with the black stencil on the top. You can do this in one operation, however you do need a final layer of paint over everything, so that it reactivates the underlying layers. It does take a bit of practice to get a completely clean print, so do it in stages to start with.

You can print on the same piece of paper as many times as you like to get a collage design effect. On this example, I used torn paper pieces as masks and rolled various colours over the top.



The paper was removed and a new rolled colour filled in the masked shapes. Flower stamps

were pressed into the plate to give resist designs which then printed out as white shapes on the final print.

Cleaning Up

In order to clean up in between prints and also to do a final clean up, have a few cloths and buckets of clean warm water on hand, so that you can rinse off most of the paint in one bucket and then do a final clean rinse in the second bucket. This way you're not constantly having to go to the sink to clean off stencils, brayers or plates and you can save on

water and throw the empty buckets on the compost heap at the end of the session.

If this is something that appeals to you, do go online to check out all the You Tube videos on Gelli printing as they are very informative. If I can help with any queries, please don't hesitate to email me.

I must say the Gelli plate is a great printing tool and although I've discussed using it on paper here, it is fabulous for printing on fabric and that may well be a subject for another time!

Raw Edge Appliqué Cup Coasters

Every so often, when I've got time to enjoy a pot of tea, rather than just a mug, I do like to use my one Royal Albert bone china cup and saucer set. I do feel that tea tastes better if you sip it from a posh cup and I just love the sensuous shapes of antique cups and saucers. They're very curvy and Rococo-esque and they are the inspiration for my free machine embroidery project this month on the website. I have designed some square coasters which just fit perfectly under a bone china cup and saucer. I've posted the full tutorial on the website, along with all the templates, cutting, assembly and sewing instructions.



This project, is a follow on from last quarter's article about free-machine embroidery. The coasters are quick to do and feature the technique of fused raw edge appliqué. There is mainly straight stitch sewing, but zig-zag stitch is optional depending on the look you want. They only take small pieces of fabric, mainly scraps and if you have some offcuts of those particularly pretty Japanese or French flowery print fabrics, they are ideal for the cups and saucers.

Hand-dyed fabrics are good for the backgrounds. You can add more or less embellishment stitching, depending on how much you enjoy free machine embroidery and if you want a bigger project, just resize into larger place mats.



As an accompaniment to the project, I thought you might be interested in some trivia about the humble cuppa. The origins of tea go back a long way and started, as all good inventions do, with a chance occurrence. According to legend, around 5000 years ago in China, a servant boiled a bowl of water for his master, the Emperor Shen Nung who was sitting under a *Camellia sinensis* tree. As he gave his master the bowl, some leaves from the tree fell into the water and the Emperor was pleasantly surprised with his new beverage. It tasted good and that was the first cup of tea ever drunk!

After China, tea drinking was introduced into Japan, Europe and the rest of the world. It became popular in England during the reign of Charles II. His Portuguese wife Catherine of

Braganza was addicted to it, so it soon became a fashionable tippie with the upper classes! It was thought to have come to Australia with the First Fleet, although there are reports that Aboriginal people drank a form of tea made with the leaves of the genus *Leptospermum* or Tea Tree.

In the early days, the tax on tea was very high and it was only the rich who could afford to drink it. As with the illegal drugs trade today, tea was often smuggled into the country and during the 18th century there was a large black market tea trade. It was not uncommon for impure ingredients to be added to bulk up the weight of the tea, including copper carbonate and sheep's dung. Once the tax was dropped, tea then became affordable for everyone and was considered by the temperance movement to be a suitable drink for the working classes – a safer alternative to alcohol!

China originally had the monopoly on tea or "tcha" production, but thanks to an invention called the Wardian Case,



some Chinese tea plants were successfully transported to Assam in India, which soon overtook China as the major tea exporter to Europe. Tea has a somewhat turbulent history, especially with its associations to the Slave Trade, however now it is mostly considered for its calming and restorative qualities and is often the centre of ritual or spiritual ceremonies around the world.

There are many varieties of tea, from the least processed and higher in anti-oxidants (green tea), to the most processed (black tea). Teas can be

mild such as Oolong or strong and smoky in flavour like Lapsang Sou-chong or even perfumed like Earl Grey. The herb teas that we know, such as peppermint tea or camomile tea are not really teas, but tisanes or herbal infusions.

However you like your cup of char, you might be interested to know that Australia comes in at about 50 in the list of tea drinking nations around the world, New Zealand is about 45th and Great Britain which I would have thought was the biggest consumer of tea, comes in around 5th!

Workshop News April – June 2016

Saturday 16th & Sunday 17th April, 2016

Natural Dyeing with Plants
2 day workshop: Beginners

Saturday 30th April and Saturday, 7th May 2016

Natural Dyeing with Plants
2 day workshop: Advanced

For more information about my workshops please visit the Workshop page on the website or email me if you have any queries.

Diary of Events April – June 2016

Friday 8th to Sunday 10th April, 2016

Paperarts Expo
Boulevard Pavilion, Melbourne Showgrounds

Thursday 14th to Sunday 17th April 2016

Australasian Quilt Convention (AQC)
Royal Exhibition Building
Carlton Gardens, Melbourne

Friday 29th April to Sunday 1st May 2016

Art Red Hill
Red Hill Consolidated School