

# Possum News

The Newsletter for Kurrara Designs



January 2020: Issue #7

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## Introduction to Possum News

*Hi Everyone*

*I had hoped to send this newsletter out to you and post it on the website well before Christmas, but I've been battling the flu for the last few weeks and as a result I've had to put everything on hold. Some of the articles were written in advance, as was the project I'd originally prepared for you, which was an easy last minute Christmas cracker. Not being able to put it all together in time, I'll save that project until next Christmas, but hope you enjoy the information enclosed in this newsletter nonetheless.*

*As in previous years, I've really enjoyed doing my workshops in 2019 and I've been blessed to have had such lovely students in each of the courses. Some students have been coming back regularly over the years and have become good friends. Particularly over this last year, I am amazed at the wonderful work they have been producing and how they have gained in confidence and honed their skills.*

*They are now finding their own avenues in which to use those skills, such as making their own brand of clothing or homewares or combining textiles into their current art practice. All it takes sometimes is daring to have a go and seeing just what you're capable of doing, sharing ideas and seeing where it can lead.*

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*For 2020 I will be repeating some of the sewing and dyeing 2-day workshops for those of you who are just starting out on your textile journey or perhaps want to brush up on or refresh your sewing skills and those workshop details are at the end of the newsletter.*

However, with various other things that are planned for this year, I'll mostly be working on some new ideas for courses, which, all being well, I'll be able to introduce in 2021. Ideally these courses will be designed for anyone who wants to develop their ideas and textile work, focussing on concepts such as colour, mark-making, patterns and textures. In short, we'll be learning more about the elements of art and principles of design. I will act more as a facilitator, helping with individual projects or providing a set project, as preferred, where each person can develop in the direction they wish to go. The format will enable us to spend time exploring particular ideas in depth and seeing how those ideas can translate into your own textile work. This gives us scope to create several designs, make samples, test materials and finally create a portfolio or artist journal to be used for your own enjoyment, maybe a future exhibition or your own business or may even help you become a teacher who can guide and nurture others to find their own creative energy. I would love to hear your thoughts if these ideas for ongoing classes are of interest to you.

The Christmas and New Year break is usually a good time to catch up with little unfinished jobs and I had so many things I wanted to work on, but with no energy it's been quite difficult to get started on them. Not that I can concentrate for very long at the moment, but a little bit of hand sewing here and there has at least helped to pass some long hours of restlessness and I feel I have achieved something! If you're lucky enough to have the time, the energy and the inclination, then, why not set some hours aside for yourself each day so you can practise the things you love to do, such as painting or dyeing small pieces of fabric and doing some machine or hand stitching, drawing, journaling, doodling or colouring. All of these activities will help you improve your skills and make you feel good at the same time and even better if you can share these moments with like-minded friends and family.

Thank you to all my lovely students and readers for all your support and kind comments over the years and I wish you all a wonderful New Year and hope that 2020 will bring you everything you wish for. I look forward to catching up with you in the months to come.

Hope you enjoy reading.

*Tina*

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## Mini Fabric Scrap Book

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This little mini folded fabric book is what I've been working on, which is not only easy to take to my textile group each week, but is also quick to pick up and add a few stitches here and there while I'm only able to concentrate for short periods. Some slow hand stitching, mainly running stitch and chain stitch, playing with some of my hand-dyed variegated threads does lift the spirits. I quite enjoy choosing to blend or contrast the thread colours against

the backgrounds I first coloured in with water-colour pencils.

This project came about from my aversion to throwing away scraps, no matter how small! I was making boxed corners in a number of tote bags and to do this I had to cut out 3" squares from both sides of the front and back fabrics, including the linings. The linings were calico and these plain little squares were crying out to have some flower images drawn on them with a Frixion pen. From

there they were free-machine stitched in black thread and those outlines formed the borders for colouring in the images with Inktense pencils.

Each square was then attached to another strip

of calico ready to be embroidered and will ultimately be backed, folded and stitched into a little folding book.

Here are some of the sections and progress so far.



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## Practice Makes Perfect

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**O**n the subject of practice, a while ago, when I was chatting to one of my artist friends about her classes, I asked her what is the most important piece of advice she gives to her students in regard to improving their painting skills. The answer? Practice, practice, practice!

This advice is true of anything that we want to learn and we all know that this is the case, but it is sometimes the hardest thing to find the time to do. We often get so busy in our lives that creative work has to fit in to a small window of time, but unfortunately, whilst we may enjoy our few hours of creative productivity in a class or workshop or regular meeting group, in the longer term, we need to allot more time to it if we are to improve. We want the instant gratification of quick results without having to spend too much time in the creating and often sites like Pinterest and Instagram are quick fixes for this gratification without having to do any work!

I think the most important part of learning anything is the practising of it, not just with the sole aim of mastering it, but to really understand it and, most importantly, to enjoy it and bring your own individuality to it.

It's all very well following along with a demonstration, seeing an item on display or on a Pinterest board and thinking, "okay, I get how that's done", but when you actually come to make it, things don't always go to plan and you may forget a step, have misunderstood how something was put together or didn't have the right tools or materials to make it look the same. It's in the doing or the practising that we learn so much and more so when things don't go right! We often learn more effectively what we should do next time, if we've actually done it wrong beforehand! So making mistakes and learning from them is very much a necessary part of the practice.

By practising we get better at observing, better at concentrating, better at honing our motor skills and ultimately better at applying our learning. We get better at drawing, stitching or cutting in a straight line, we get better at tasting and combining flavours, we get better at growing and looking after the plants in our gardens, designing layouts to give a stunning show all year round. The reason we get better is because by practising something we are almost doing it automatically and don't have to think about the mechanics of it. A different

part of our brain, let's call it our imagination, takes over and we can now manipulate our materials and tools in a far more creative way. In doing that we are being playful, experimental and non-judgemental and doing things for the sheer joy of it. That's when our work really starts to take off and becomes awesome!

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## Compare the Pears

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**O**ne of the things I particularly want to make more time to practise is digitising embroidery designs.

I've been studying with the lovely Gerrie Gillen for several years, learning how to digitise designs using Digitizer MBX software and a few months ago I attended a workshop with Canadian digitiser John Deer, where we worked on a new, but similar digitising programme called Hatch, which I have recently purchased. Although I have learned quite a lot over the years, I am only just scratching the surface as there is always so much more to learn and more to discover.

The areas I'm focusing on at the moment are thread sketching and painting, which are subjects we covered this year in my creative machine embroidery workshops. There are lots of ways to thread sketch and paint

The American artist, Jackson Pollock once said, "Painting is self-discovery. Every good artist paints what he is". I think we can extend this to all forms of creative work. The more you practice, the more you will discover "you" and therein lies the perfection!

using free-machine embroidery, from partial to full coverage of the fabric with stitch. We worked with various designs and colouring media and then used free motion stitch to enhance and embellish those designs. With free motion you are in control and can manipulate the stitches in any way you wish, which is why it's so spontaneous and so individual.

I thought it would be fun to bring some of that free motion spontaneity to create digital thread sketched and painted designs. I've been practising with Hatch software to find ways of using the various built-in stitch options to create form, shadow, depth and texture. It's one thing to create the design digitally, but it needs to be stitched out and tested to see how it performs and whether it works. What looks good on the computer, doesn't always stitch out in the way you want it to.

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## Workshop News for 2020

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### Natural (Plant) Dyeing Workshops

The spring and autumn seasons are ideal times to gather plant material and use them for dyeing fabrics, threads and fibres.



**28th and 29th March 2020 -  
Natural Dyeing for Beginners**

**21st and 22nd November 2020 -  
Natural Dyeing for Beginners**

**28th and 29th November 2020 -  
Natural Dyeing for Beginners**

These introductory workshops will help you to understand and try out all the basic processes of natural dyeing and give you the confidence to practice and improve your skills at home. As the groups are small (2 – 4 students) we can be flexible in the topics we cover and can work on particular areas that are of interest to the group.

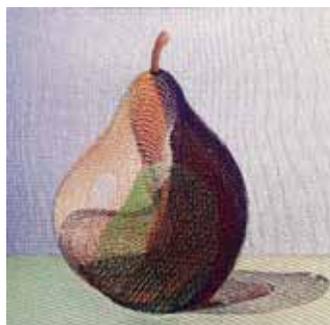
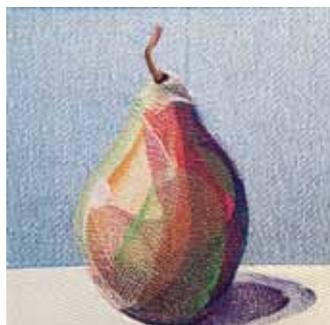
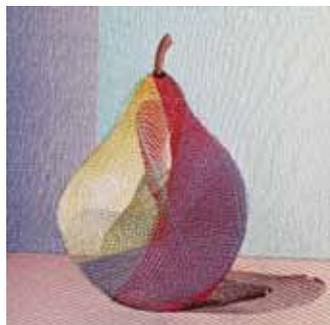
Over the two days we will use samples from all the fibre groups suitable for this type of dyeing. In particular, we will spend time exploring the different ways to prepare your fabrics and plant material beforehand so that your prints and backgrounds are more consistent and successful. You will also learn how to extend the colour stages of each dye bath and create nuanced colour palettes.



Here is my first stitched out design, prior to my 2-day workshop and whilst it's certainly not perfect in terms of shadows or texture, I love how it looks like a wireframe design. The background needs refining however, as it has got travel lines of underlay stitching visible through the top stitching, which I don't like, but practising a few more versions, I managed to eliminate those lines, thanks to Gerrie's advice!

a more spontaneous feel to them. Learning to see is a big part of the practice and I try to take notice each day of objects and how the light falls on them.

Pears are a great shape to study, to learn more about form and I ended up doing a little series of them using slightly different colour schemes (see below). It does get addictive, so I can feel more fruit designs will be in the pipeline next year!



Within the limits of the digitising software, I can blend coloured threads in layers and create a blurred effect or make the stitch lines more prominent so they are sharper-edged.

Lots of stitches can distort the fabric, both in free motion stitching and in digitised embroidery, so varying the stitching direction and density not only flattens out the distortion, but it can also reinforce the contours of the various shapes to give them a more 3 dimensional appearance.

The challenge for me is to practise blending and softening those edges digitally so that they are more painterly and have

## MX Procion Dyeing Workshops

This 2-day workshop will give you the chance to have a play with Procion MX cold water dyes, which are really versatile and enable you to create an unlimited array of colours on a range of cottons, linens, flannelettes, silks and muslins.



### 18th and 19th April 2020 - Having Fun with Fibre Reactive Dyes

Procion MX dyes are just what you need for assemblage dyeing, where you can create a collection of fibres, threads and fabrics that are perfectly colour co-ordinated for a particular project.

We'll be looking at various ways of creating exciting colour schemes and patterns on fabrics, including low water immersion, tray and ice-dyeing, as well as painting your own threads, laces and ribbons and working with stencils, masks and gel plates to make your own hand-dyed monoprint art cloth.

## Sewing Workshops

These workshops were popular last year, so I've repeated them again this year for anyone who missed out and would like to put their sewing machine through its paces!



### 16th and 17th May 2020 - Sewing Machine and Creative Machine Stitching Basics

### 20th and 21st June 2020 - Creative Machine Embroidery I – (Using Water Soluble Stabilizers)

### 18th and 19th July 2020 - Creative Machine Embroidery II – (Painting Pictures with Threads)

The first workshop is designed for anyone who is either thinking of buying a new machine, or has just bought a machine and wants to learn what it can do. Alternatively, you may have been doing general sewing for years, but maybe want to learn how to use a sewing machine for more creative textile projects and learn how to incorporate free motion sewing into your work.

All the parts of the machine are explained, including the importance of choosing the right needles and threads for the job. There will be lots of hands-on practice and sampling, learning how to make the most of built-in stitches, playing with needle and bobbin tensions and free motion stitches to create some lovely line and texture effects in your work.

The second workshop will extend your knowledge to create wearable art pieces or 3D structures, using water soluble stabilizers. There will be sample class exercises you can practise, but you can create anything you would like within this workshop.

In the third workshop you will be creating free machined picture artworks from your own or class photographs or use your imagination to draw or doodle a scene and colour it in, using a variety of art media and threads.

All workshops listed above will be held at Kurrara Designs Studios, Red Hill Vic. More details of these workshops are available on email request.