The National College of Art & Design

DESIGN FACULTY
Department of Fashion and Textiles

A CREATIVE SOLUTION TO THE ART -v- CRAFT CONFLICT

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CONTENTS

LIST OF PLATES

Introduction

The separation between craft and art is not a dividing line, but rather a largely uncharted space. The relatively small number of artists who exist productively within these boundaries are, understandably, encountering difficulties establishing their methods as a legitimate form of expression. This is to be expected as they travel unfamiliar ground. Their existence presents the artworld with a new challenge, the resolution of which could have just as stunning an impact as modernism in its day. I believe that the processes used by the pre-World War I movement, **Der Blaue Reiter** - in particular in their eclectic Almanac - enabled them to establish the legitimacy of their new art which, however ground-breaking at the time, came eventually to be wholeheartedly accepted. More recently, similar processes are being exploited by contemporary embroiderer, Alice Kettle*. Having evolved from a fine art background using a textile medium, she has had to develop a fresh methodology for her new form of expression. Since post-War modernism, acknowledgement of the past related to any fine-art piece has come to be seen as damaging to the aesthetic experience involved. *"The cornerstone of modernist ideology is the idea of the autonomous art object".* Metcalf suggests that the concepts of autonomy *"are taken as basic assumptions by many of the most respected craft practitioners."* (Metcalf, 1993, p. 41). By unlocking the craft culture from the chains of the fine-art autonomous aesthetic, could the gap between craft and fine-art be filled to the benefit of both?

There will always be conflict and understandable tensions between two such closely-related, albeit dissimilar faculties as art and craft. Within the textile sphere alone, artforms such as "textile art", "fibre art" and "contemporary embroidery" have emerged. Culled from the extremities of fine art and design, these new arts have attracted attention. Under the spotlight bask a growing number of newcomers alongside a few established figures; Hesse, Abkanowicz, Oppenheim, Zeisler and Falkenstein. There is a particular group of artists who use the textile medium as a tool. Themes continually explored in their work include identity, racism and loss. These tend to be fine-artists in disguise and, as such, already possess the key to the gallery door. The artists involved are not committing themselves to textiles, instead they retain the right to choose whatever material seems appropriate to express their concepts. Polly Apfelbaum, a fibre artist, states: *"I don't want to be contained by a category of materials, but rather by a category of ideas ... using velvet and sheeting now doesn't mean I'll always be*

* In the course of researchig for this Thesis, I interviewed Alice Kettle at her home in Winchester on March 30th., 1995.

working with them." (Marincola, 1995, p. 34). This, in itself, is not a disadvantage. Paula Marincola, author of the article Fabric As Fine Art - Thinking Across the Divide, drew parallels between fibre art and the photography scene; *"which was for a long time similarly segregated by medium from painting and sculpture"* (P. Marincola, 1995, p. 38). It was fine artists using photography as a tool who finally brought it an identity. Marincola's parallel is valid but textile art differs in so far as textiles possess a varied and long past, filled with tradition and technique. It cannot simply join identities with fine-art.

After a careful exploration of expressionism, it is apparent that it arose as a need for artistic freedom, inspired by a changing world. Here began the canon that established the authority of the artist. The artist tells us that what he has created is art; if we are convinced, it becomes so. The painting and sculpture tradition is long and varied and, when circumstances allowed for change over a century ago, fine art became an expression of freedom by the artist that was a victory - a human accomplishment.

Bruce Metcalf, the learned author of the article, Replacing the Myth of Modernism, argues very convincingly that modernism and its legacy have done irreparable damage to the arts and crafts of this age: *"By adopting modernist rules, craftsmen revealed their cultural 'cringe' - an implicit sense of inferiority about the traditional roles of craft".* (Metcalf, 1993, p. 42). Metcalf talks of trained craftsmen, unfulfilled by their craft, who hunger for the status enjoyed by modern art. These unhappy souls supposedly adopt the style of any recently-certified movement in a confused longing for fame and fortune. He fails to mention the trained painter who is equally aware of modernist theory and also jumps on the "certified movement" bandwagon. Artists

Plate No. 1

and craftspeople alike are open to criticism for attempting to claim the victories of modernism as their own. Metcalf speaks reverently of the craftsperson who is satisfied and complete when creating the gift item or unique home furnishing. *"Craftspeople should stop trying to make modern art".* (Metcalf, 1993, p. 40). But who has the right to say to the craftsperson who feels no contentment in the crafts arena, that he has no right to create modern art in any medium he chooses?

Metcalf criticises the work of craft artists like Harvey Littleton (glass), William Daley (ceramics) and Heikki Seppa (metalsmithing). He accuses them of amputating *"the many social implications of craft."* (Metcalf, 1993, p. 42). Whether that is true or not, no one person can demand artistic apartheid of this sort. It would be a shame if craftsmen did not try to imitate the modernist autonomous object as the very nature of using a craft medium would deflate the modern aesthetic criteria. Metcalf correctly explained that, when a craftsperson and a modern sculptor create sculpture, there are innate differences. *"Crafts-based sculpture tends to be more decorative, more richly visual, more respectful of material and process but also less cognizant of the history of sculpture and art-world issues."* (Metcalf, 1993, p. 40). These qualities cannot undermine its aesthetic value. Admittedly, the crafted result can never fulfil the post-war modernist ideology that craved the autonomous art object but, as Jan Janeiro asked in her commentary: *"What art has no function? What art uses no materials or skills to give it form?"* (Janeiro, 1995, p. 6). And, even if an art object could be self-contained, existing without reference to or influence from anything else, why should it hold more aesthetic value than an object born of tradition and crafted honestly in any chosen medium.

The post-war need to do away with the past and the traditions and techniques that went with it sprang from a deep and lasting disgust in human nature. After the death that swept nations, there was a need to establish a new identity. The society that grew from the ashes needed only to hope for a second chance, a fresh start, to begin again - and so they did. The need to detach human identity from the past is not relevant any more. The modern craft, whether utilitarian or not, is much sought-after. People want their past returned to them.

Chapter I brings us to the past, to the theories of **Der Blaue Reiter**. For the purpose of this thesis, it is not important to evaluate their paintings. The experimental work of Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, the instigators of **Der Blaue Reiter**, is an important part of art history but, as such, is not relevant to this thesis. The focus is on the publication of Der Blaue Reiter Almanac, in which they argued the need for their new art methodology. Their theory that the only people truly qualified to write about art were artists, was unheard-of at the time. They were expressionists weary of the impressionist glance. As artists, they "saw" more and, subsequently, had more to say. It was this need to express themselves verbally that left the loudest mark in modernist history. They argued their theories, assessed their own work, evaluated the past and made suggestions for the future. In the days of **Der Blaue Reiter**, from 1911 to 1914, before the war, there was no need to leave the past behind. They delved deep into history, including a wide selection contemporary and ancient work. They sought out contributions from all of the arts, music, theatre and literature, as well as painting. These tastes of history, alongside their own work, showed their open-minded acceptance of every form of human expression. This quality is very much apparent also in the contemporary work of Alice Kettle.

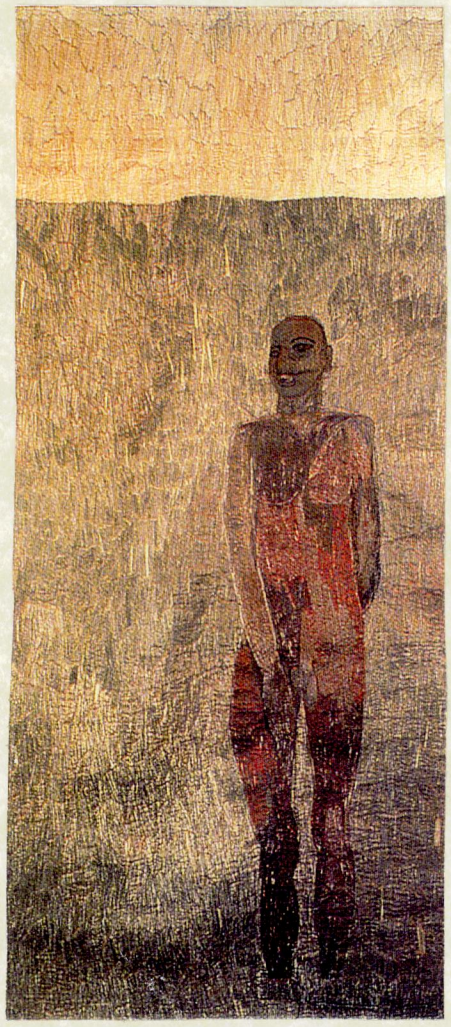


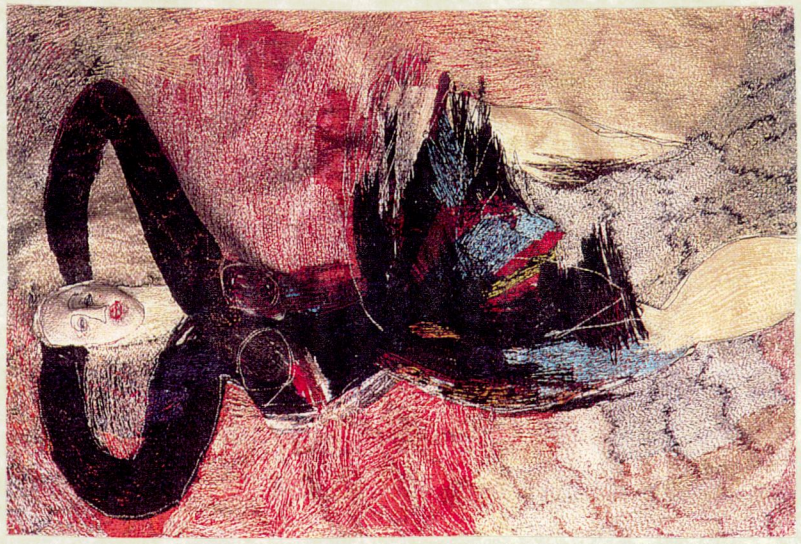
Plate No. 2

Kettle (Chapter II) is primarily involved with fine-art concepts and the process of establishing an "emotional link" with her subject. Her training as a fine-art painter and her lack of concern for the technical skills traditionally associated with embroidery, should place her among the conceptual art ranks. But her love of embroidery that led to the establishment of her personal style sets her apart. Kettle's success lies in her eclectic references to past and present. When asked where her ideas come from, she answered:

> *Events in my life - travels to Eastern Turkey and India - the mood and attitude of a person. The clarity and structure of icons - Boticelli's evocative worship of female beauty - the freedom and line in Matisse's painting, sculpture and collage - each at various times has fascinated me.* (A. Kettle Textile Artist, 1992, p. 3).

A self-proclaimed expressionist, Kettle refers always to her inner self, but naturally reveals an understanding of the past. This concern for what has gone before has, traditionally, been a priority of craft. But he artforms that exist at the edge of textile design and fine art have, to an extent, taken what is good from both without interfering with either. As Jan Janeiro states: *"I think the textile arts have, intuitively perhaps, understood a portion of the complicated demands of history - that the past interfaces with the present to create the future."* (Janeiro, 1995, p. 6) Kettle has not only identified the need for acknowledgement of the past, she has also tackled the on-going supremacy of painting. Her large bold textile paintings challenge established modern art theories.

> *Alice Kettle offers a generous and poetic vision of the human form and the visible world. Her works are, at the same time, 'primitive' and refined and alternate matt and shiny surfaces to give an extremely silky, sensual texture, thus heightening the subtly maintained ambiguity between textile art and painting.* (24 Heurs, Switzerland, quoted in A.Kettle Textile Artist, 1992, inside front cover).



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In a spiral of events that leads us to the present, it is clear that the way forward lies in acceptance of our history and that the past has naturally formed our artistic perceptions. Bruce Metcalf said as much in his article, *"Modernism's flaw was to demand an entirely new world, filled with new art and architecture, and mass-produced design based on formalism and functionalism, while arrogantly ignoring the human need for rootedness."* (Metcalf, 1993, p. 44).

Chapter I

DER BLAUE REITER ALMANAC

The **Blaue Reiter** expressionist movement was conceived in the minds of two men, Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc. It was the legitimate child of the **New Artists Association of Munich** (N.K.V.M.) and, as such, was involved with giving them, and artists like them, a voice with which to compete with the established and publicly-recognised artists of the time. In a letter that was circulated on the occasion of the foundation of **N.K.V.M.**, Kandinsky states: *"We are hoping to give material shape to the spiritual kinship between artists, a form that will give us occasion to address the public with joint forces."* (Elger, 1989, p. 133). Kandinsky, who had been the chairman of the **N.K.V.M.**, resigned his post in December 1911, when the association failed to accept his submission for their third organised exhibition due to his painting being a few centimetres too big. Kandinsky felt the existence of this rule to be stifling and defeated his hopes for change within the organisation. Marc also resigned his membership at this time, sharing Kandinsky's drive for change.

Alaska

servant girl. In the vaudeville theater the butterfly-colored dancer enchants the most amorous couples as intensely as the solemn sound of the organ in a Gothic cathedral seizes both believer and unbeliever.

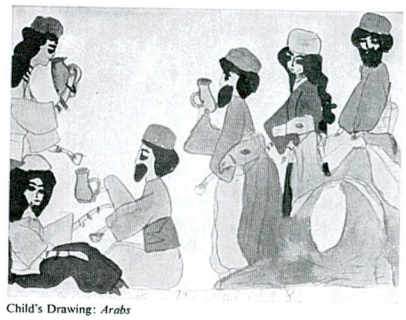
Forms are powerful expressions of powerful life. Differences in expression come from the material, word, color, sound, stone, wood, metal. One need not understand each form. One also need not read each language.

The contemptuous gesture with which connoisseurs and artists have to this day banished all artistic forms of primitive cultures to the fields of ethnology or applied art is amazing at the very least.

What we hang on the wall as a painting is basically similar to the carved and painted pillars in an African hut. The African considers his idol the comprehensible form for an incomprehensible idea, the personification of an abstract concept. For us the painting is the comprehensible form for the obscure, incomprehensible conception of a deceased person, of an animal, of a plant, of the whole magic of nature, of the rhythmical.

Does Van Gogh's portrait of Dr. Gachet not originate from a spiritual life similar to the amazed grimace of a Japanese juggler cut

88



Child's Drawing: *Arabs*

in a wood block? The mask of the disease demon from Ceylon is the gesture of horror of a primitive race [27] by which their priests conjure sickness. The grotesque embellishments found on a mask have their analogies in Gothic monuments and in the almost unknown buildings and inscriptions in the primeval forests of Mexico. What the withered flowers are for the portrait of the European doctor, so are the withered corpses for the mask of the conjurer of disease. The cast bronzes of the Negroes from Benin in West Africa (discovered in 1889), the idols from the Easter Islands in the remotest Pacific, the cape of a chieftain from Alaska, and the wooden masks from New Caledonia speak the same powerful language as the chimeras of Notre-Dame and the tombstones in Frankfurt Cathedral.

Everywhere, forms speak in a sublime language right in the face of European aesthetics. Even in the games of children, in the hat of a cocotte, in the joy of a sunny day, invisible ideas materialize quietly.

The joys, the sorrows of man, of nations, lie behind the inscriptions, paintings, temples, cathedrals, and masks, behind the musical compositions, stage spectacles, and dances. If they are not there, if form becomes empty and groundless, then there is no art. [26]

89

Plate No. 4

These ideals of a new artistic form of expression were to carry through to the **Blaue Reiter** and give rise to the need for Der Blaue Reiter Almanac. The almanac was filled with comparative and contrasting art, from Chinese art to Henri Rousseau to Picasso. The articles themselves were written and donated by the artists involved. The publication was an eclectic gathering of ideals and theories that not only educated the public but also gave the artists themselves a sense of purpose in some way justifying their experimental techniques. Through

sharing their inner relationship with their medium, they gained in strength and velocity. This strength placed them in a position to sustain their argument with the galleries and conformative artists of that time.

Wassily Kandinsky was born on December 4th., 1866, to a well-off family in Moscow. It was a time of peace in Russia. Alexander II had abolished serfdom. He had also improved public education and built-up trading relations with other countries. Kandinsky spent much of his life travelling, beginning at the early age of three, when he accompanied his parents on a tour of Italy. Memories of this trip stayed with him all his life and he recounted them and others in his autobiography Reminiscences. Kandinsky's father was very special to him and he paid homage to this man in this book. *"His delicate tender expressive features which went so well with his elegant silhouette and his amazingly beautiful hands."* (Vezin, 1992, p. 24). He is referred to as being a sensitive open-minded man, who enjoyed nothing more than visiting exhibitions, where he spent his time gazing intently at the paintings. He instilled into his son a lasting respect for the arts. he would often bring the young Kandinsky with him on his trips to galleries, where both would share their thoughts about the paintings. Particularly happy memories from Kandinsky's childhood were the special trips to Moscow every summer. Father and son would wait impatiently each year for summer to arrive. He once said of his father: *"He does not condemn what he does not understand; he endeavours to understand by questioning everyone he hopes may be able to provide an answer."* (Vezin, 1992, p. 24).

This free-thinking mind that Kandinsky admired so much had an obvious effect on his personality. While Kandinsky was still quite young, his parents separated and he was mainly raised by his aunt, Elisabeth Ticheef, his mother's sister. The actual break-up is not mentioned in any of Kandinsky's writings. We can only assume that it did not affect his life too much. He certainly had enough love for his aunt Elisabeth: *"She had a great, indelible influence on my development. She was an enlightened creature to whom I owe the birth of my love of music, stories and, later, of Russian literature and the profound nature of the Russian people."* (Vezin, 1992, p. 27). While his father certainly gave him a respect for the arts, it is obvious his deep love came from his aunt Elisabeth. Kandinsky was nurtured and encouraged by these great-minded people. This left him without the fear of change that stops many from fulfilling their dreams.

In 1896, at the age of thirty, Kandinsky left his promising career in law for that of painting. He still had his father's blessing and, more realistically, the financial support he needed to begin a new life. Kandinsky was, without doubt, an academic and had previously written many papers while studying law. He was more than familiar with the complexities of the written word. This talent was to become an indispensable aid to him during his life as a painter. Following an inner desire to go beyond what was known in the history of painting, he would use words to explain and substantiate each step he took towards abstraction.

Early in 1909, Wassily Kandinsky and Alexi von Jawelensky, a fellow-Russian, founded the **New Association of Munich Artists.** They were akin to the **Die Brücke** group of artists, based in Dresden, in so far as the work produced was of a progressive nature and had not become bogged down by a need to satisfy a market. It had become obvious that neither Kandinsky nor Jawelensky could belong in the **Munich Secession**, founded in 1892. The artists involved in this association had not progressed far from the Impressionist ideal. So arose the need for the **N.K.V.M.**

Kandinsky and Jawelensky announced the existence of the **N.K.V.M.** and their intention of *"addressing the public with joint forces"* (Elger, 1989, p. 133) in a circular and waited for an offer from a gallery in Munich to hold their first exhibition. It was important to Kandinsky that the group establish themselves primarily in the Bavarian capital. Nearly a year later, on December 1st, 1909, in Munich, the **N.K.V.M.** opened their doors to greet a wary public. The critics were deeply confused, although, by showing relatively tame works, efforts had been made not to shock or disturb. Also, only painters living in Munich were accepted, to highlight the Bavarian origin of the association. Even though every precaution had been taken to ensure that this first offering should run smoothly, the public was not impressed and the critics were openly negative. *"Their exhibition is a synthesis of futile summaries and mannerisms from the art of all known peoples and regions, from the primitive cannibals up to the neo-decadent Parisians."* (Vezin, 1992, p. 94). The **N.K.V.M.** carried on regardless and had a second exhibition on 1st. September, 1910, also in Munich, the city they all loved. This time, no restrictions were placed on the exhibitors and reactionary marriages of text and image greeted the Munich art lover. The public was outraged. There was open hostility towards the group, especially Kandinsky. Try as they might, this Bavarian populace could make no sense of these radical paintings. Only one man, Franz Marc, was ready to declare that these artists were the way forward. *"That they have sought a path of their own only enhances their merit."* (Vezin, 1992, p. 97). It was during the following year that circumstance led to the acceptance of Franz Marc into the organisation. Kandinsky and Marc became close friends who soon discovered they shared the same dream.

On December 2nd., 1911, two days before Kandinsky's 45th. birthday, while planning the opening of the third **N.K.V.M.** exhibition, these two would split from the group and formed **Der Blaue Reiter**. One day after the split, Marc wrote to his brother:

> *The die is cast. Kandinsky and I ... have left the association ... Now it is the two of us who must continue the fight! The Editors of the* ***Blaue Reiter*** *will now be the starting point for new exhibitions. I think this is quite good. We will try to become the centre of the modern movement.* (Lankheit, 1965, p. 14).

Kandinsky and Marc had been working on plans for an artists' journal of some form since June of that year. In a letter sent from Kandinsky to Marc during that month, the excitement of the initial idea was apparent:

> *A kind of almanac with reproductions and articles ... and a chronicle!! That is, reports on exhibitions reviewed by artists, and artists alone. In the book, the entire year must be reflected; and a link to the past as well as a ray to the future must give this mirror its full life.* (Lankheit, 1965, p. 15)

Just as the artists of the **N.K.V.M.** were involved in establishing a united front to further their experimental techniques, this almanac, soon to be known only as **Der Blaue Reiter**, was another way in which to share the camaraderie that had built up between these normally solitary creatures, with an unknowing public. Kandinsky always possessed a need for the written word and it is clear that, without his theories written directly from his inner experiences, neither his fellow-artists nor the public would have progressed so quickly in their understanding and acceptance of non-representational work. That is not to say that understanding would not have come. Over time, these experiments with colour and form would have become familiar and the logical conclusion reached by abstract artists would have been obvious to any observer, as it is now. But the urgency with which Kandinsky imparted the theories behind his work, shows in him a respect for the public and his fellow-artists. He did not selfishly hold his ideas above the head of the viewer but, with the true heart of an academic, he felt the need to impart his discoveries to whomever was interested and he once said: *"Whether an artist also expresses himself theoretically about his own works, or whether he lets them speak for themselves, is a matter of personal preference."* (Elger, 1989, p. 144). Kandinsky also never presumed to judge other artists for the choices they made concerning their work.

Kandinsky and Marc contacted artists of all kinds, from Russia, Italy, Paris and all over Germany, requesting submissions from them. All were willing to be part of the almanac and none expected payment. A quote by Delacroix that was part of the finished almanac, sums up the spirit behind the creation of it: *"Most writing on art is by people who are not artists, thus all the misconceptions."* (Kandinsky, 1911, p. 81). Given the chance to express their theories to the public, the groups exploded with creativity. By contacting experts in the fields of art, music and literature, regardless of their nationality, a wide and varied response was guaranteed. This cosmopolitan approach to the arts ensured a fresh, non-biased product that was to become a rarity in those days before the war. In January, 1912, when Jean Arp, a Swiss man, joined the ranks of **Der Blaue Reiter**, Kandinsky could contain his excitement no longer and put the following question in a letter to Marc at the time: *"Do you feel, like me, that all nations are being drawn towards one another by a mysterious bond?"* (Vezin, 1992, p. 128).

Articles, musical scores and imagery flowed in. Kandinsky and Marc abandoned their painterly concerns and assumed the roles of editors. Kandinsky and Marc were also formulating their own offerings and when the final deadline passed, Kandinsky expressed his relief in a letter to Marc: *"Thank God, my article went off too. The final paragraph would not take shape. It's been weighing like a stone on my stomach."* (Vezin, 1992, p. 146). The finished Almanac contained nineteen articles and essays, 144 reproductions, some in colour, eight vignettes and three scores by Schonenberg, Berg and Webern. The illustrations were an international mixture, including Bavarian glass paintings, Chinese painting, Russian folk prints, figures from Egyptian shadow plays, a print of a 14th. Century embroidery as well as paintings by Henri Matisse, Van Gogh, Emil Nolde, Paul Klee, Henri Rousseau and even examples of children's art. Kandinsky designed the cover and there were four paintings each from him and Marc. Works that had nothing in common were often placed opposite each other. This was done to *"stimulate a certain effect in the viewer's mind."* (Vezin, 1992, p. 151). They discarded the normal chronological order that any reader would expect to see.

Plate No. 5

Marc wrote to Kandinsky to suggest the inclusion of work by the **Die Brücke** group of artists. Kandinsky was not keen, but finally agreed to include one small piece from each artist. He explained this: *"A small reproduction means: this is also done. A big one means: this is what we do."* (Vezin, 1992, p. 151). This reflected the lack of enthusiasm Kandinsky held for their work.

The almanac must have seemed confusing when first released but the articles and the apparent careless scatter of illustrations demonstrated the revolutionary agendas of the artists involved, in particular, Kandinsky's daring contributions On The Question of Form and The Yellow Sound. The courageous content of the book from the start gave Kandinsky's theories greater credibility. His articles were placed at the rear of the almanac, completing the impact of the volume. *"The reader, who had allowed himself to be swept along by the new vision of art described by Der Blaue Reiter ... would be ready to accept the revolutionary values Kandinsky was defining."* (Vezin, 1992, p. 160). For Kandinsky, the almanac was a necessary step on his journey towards abstraction.

Chapter II

EXPRESSION

The title **Expressionism** was first coined to describe a movement in the 19th. Century and has continued on through the decades in many different forms. It followed Impressionism on the path to Modernism, joining in the search for a new art to go with the new world that was evolving from that time. One factor that distinguished Expressionist artists from their predecessors was their distaste for the Impressionists who created weak simulations of reality and strove for illusion. According to Herman Bahr, the problem for the average beholder of Expressionist art is that the way that the artist 'sees' nature is fundamentally different from the way the beholder 'sees'. *"And if the beholder retorts vehemently that the painter should express nothing but what he sees, the Expressionists assure him that they, too, paint only what they see."* (Bahr, 1982, p. 165).

In general terms, Expressionists are primarily pre-occupied with expressing their emotions at the expense of a classical, illusionistic, finished piece. They are less interested in producing a true-to-life image, in the visual sense of the phrase, than in conveying the personal process involved. They focus on their usually figurative subject and pour their feelings into that character to express what they feel about their fellow man, the nature of the world and their feelings about themselves.

Wassily Kandinsky, while working on Der Blaue Reiter Almanac, stated that *"All artists were aiming to integrate not only their impressions of the outside world, but also of their inner world and, to do so with a new artistic form of expression."* (Elger, 1989, p. 133).

Alice Kettle is a contemporary female textile artist who admits to using emotional methodology throughout the making of every piece: *"It is an emotional process; as I make each piece, each decision involves aesthetic judgements in response to feelings."* (Needle Arts, Dec. 1990, p. 24). Alice Kettle is one of the many modern-day Expressionists. She draws freely from the work of the past and incorporates that with her own experience and knowledge. Born and brought up in Winchester, England, Kettle studied fine-art painting at Reading University and then undertook a post-graduate diploma in textiles at Goldsmiths' College, London, a college long renowned for its fine-art approach to textiles. She graduated in 1986 with a Special Commendation. It was during this time that she fell in love with embroidery, she explained:

"It's such a fluent medium, you can do anything you like. I thought the world had opened up. I didn't have to paint on square canvas anymore. I could work in any shape and mix the colour." (Hampshire Chronicle, Jan 20th., 1995, p. 13).

Plate No. 6

Kettle gained immediate recognition with the vast machine-embroidered hangings she made for her diploma at Goldsmiths' College - Harlequin Madonna, Eve Falling From Grace and Two Women. The fabric 'painted' with seductively beautiful figures, reclining or tumbling against texturally patterned backgrounds, hung from near ceiling height to spill onto the floor. The technique is intensive machine embroidery. The threads entirely cover whatever base material she uses (usually canvas). They often cover it in several layers, as paint does in a painting. This technique produces folds and a sense of movement in the surface, quite apparent from the fluency given by the appearance of the threads themselves. She experiments widely with the textures of the threads by changing the tension on the machine while sewing. Some areas appear to stand out three-dimensionally from the piece. This is achieved by repeatedly stitching over the same area until it is hard and stands out from the surface and its undulations. Kettle has taken advantage of a technical flaw in so far as rippled fabric is not usually the intention of a machine embroiderer. This capability to accentuate a technical fault into a personal style is a sign of Kettle's fine-art training.

During her time at Goldsmiths' Kettle continually pushed herself, never allowing her work to become stale. Through research of artists as varied as Boticelli and Howard Hodgkin, Kettle acquired a respect for the figure and a knowledge of the power of colour to portray emotion. She also studied the formal and pattern-making aspects of textiles. At this time, Kettle identified something missing from her work. In order to resolve this absence, she looked to the past, to the work of Giotto, Mediaeval tapestry and Russian icons. But, ultimately, it is Matisse who has had the most profound effect on her: *"I feel more in tune with Matisse than with any other artist. I go back to him all the time."* (Harris, 1995, p. 16).

Henri Matisse (1869-1954) has inspired many artists throughout this century. For Matisse, the discovery of the cut-out method contained and expressed everything he had been striving to achieve as a painter and a sculptor. After decades of painting, he began moulding pure powerful colour with scissors. These rich experiments have been a constant revelation for Kettle: *"I can see parallels between embroidery and cut-outs. In embroidery, you are putting two threads, which you can't mix as you can paint, you can't physically join them together, you can only place them next to each other. It's exactly what Matisse was doing with the paper cut-outs, using scissors to create gesture. And, as with embroidery, you can read them as purely decorative, but there's so much more to them than that."* (Harris, 1995, p. 17).

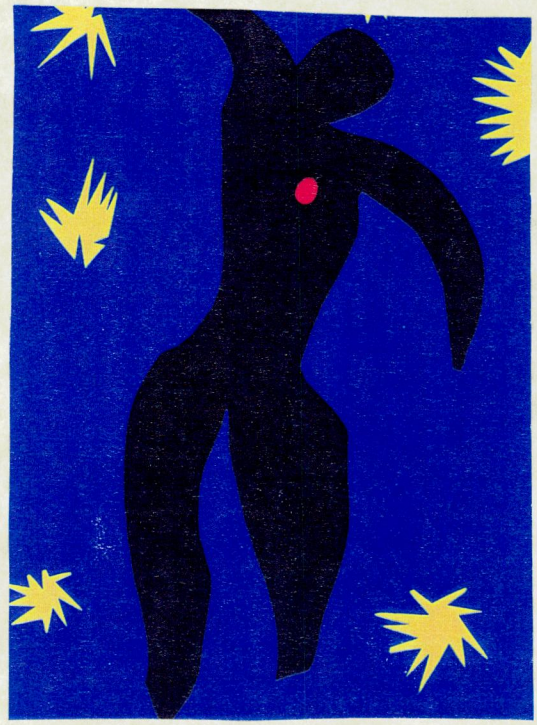


Plate No. 7

Alice Kettle's form of Expressionism was, initially, close to the Abstract Expressionists' ideal. Her paintings contained no figure for most of the time she studied fine at Reading University. The discovery of the figure as an expressive device was the first step in Kettle's liberation as an artist: *"The figure is the absolute essence of the work, the human content, the emotional link for me as an artist."* (Harris, 1995, p. 11).

Through the strength of her feelings, Kettle penetrates the base fabric of her work with the machine needle, not placing, but planting layer after layer of colour deep within the fibres. Not content to simply coat the fabric with paint, as she once did, Kettle's need for expression drives her to grow her figure by feeding the fabric with thread, until the character becomes real to her. Her early work presented us with female figures, limp and fragile, closed eyes or bent head; they are unaware of the viewer's presence. They are contained - and, possibly, constrained - within the boundaries of the piece. Her more recent work explores androgynous figures dancing, jumping, floating or stretching with greater strength and less vulnerability

Plate No. 8

in stance and expression. *"In each piece, I am trying to represent a particular circumstance and make some statement about me and my work."* (Needle Arts, Dec. 1990, p. 24).

In her piece Eve Falling From Grace (1986), we see a serenely beautiful woman dreamily slipping head-first, downwards. Her body is encrusted with patterned skin and the background is dappled and hazy. Yet, it seems to sparkle and swirl like a windy autumn night. The pattern itself grows larger and more spaced-out near the bottom of the piece. This gives the hanging a beautifully stylized perspective. Kettle explains this: *"The Eve piece is like a waterfall, tumbling out of the wall onto the floor, so that the tapestry and carpet formats converge. Eve falls through the space into a worldly state. She is serpent-like and seductively beautiful, a state to which we all aspire."* (Adamgentin, 1990, p. 74). The face is, as always, the focal point. Amid the intensely-patterened background, bursting with rich colour, the pale delicate face draws one in. Her faces are embroidered so heavily that they stand in relief and can be seen from the side amid the rippled fabric - a textile painting that possesses an innate sculptural quality. As Matisse said of his cut-outs while compiling his book, Jazz: *"Cutting directly into colour reminds me of a sculptor's carving into stone."* (Guichard-Meli, 1984, p. 18).

Kettle does not carefully stitch pre-planned designs. The decisions made are spontaneous and may be changed at any moment. *"The figure grows as I work, and tremendous changes can*

take place." (Morrell, 1994, p. 90). She compares this process to that of Matisse, whom she saw painting a picture in a short film and *"changing it dramatically ten times"*. (Morrell, 1994, p. 90).

She boldly enforces her larger-than-life figures onto the fabric. Kettle's image unfolds infinitively and changes are inherent in her process. This methodology must be tightly controlled when she works to commission, but even this is an exciting challenge to Kettle. She doesn't believe that carrying through a design process lessons the integrity of her work, and sees each project as a *"challenging counterbalance to her exhibition work and enjoys the stimulus of a focus and deadline for research"* (Harris, 1995, p. 18). This satisfaction in the production of a tightly reined result shows again her links to 'craft', and the design process involved in any crafted piece. In 1992 Kettle received a commission from the Holy Sepulchre Chapel in Winchester, her home town. She was to construct an alter frontal intended to complement an aging twelfth century wall painting. The design was carefully completed in softly glowing pastel shades with hints of brighter colour to complement the crumbling painting. The piece is quite minimal, unlike Kettle's previous work. She explained this: *"It was a sensitive area I had to play things down so as not to compete with frescos"* (Interview Kettle, 30th March, 1995)

Kettle received another commission in 1993 to be sited on P & O's new super liner the **Oriano** and took her a full year to complete. It is believed to be the biggest embroidery composition by a single artist in the world. The embroidery is called Glimpses of India and is made up of six panels, each measuring two metres square. Kettle has had amazing success with large pieces. The originality and sheer size of the pieces ensure Kettle a place as one of the brightest artists of her generation. She is unafraid to indulge in small joyous pieces, if her emotions demand as in Four Happy Folk, 1992, (22 x 15cm), created after the birth of her second child. When asked how she saw her work progressing? she replied, *"I can't look ahead, it evolves from day to day"*. (Interview Kettle, 30th., March, 1995).

Plate No. 9

The move from painting to embroidery made by Alice Kettle is not a common one. But, made in the spirit of freedom that surrounds the art world of this era, she has acquired heartfelt acclaim from the public and critics alike. But it must be said that her roots do lie in fine-art painting. This endows Kettle with a well-practised talent for verbally expressing the inner relationship she has with her medium. This knowledge Kettle holds has made the lack of verbal expression throughout textiles shamefully apparent.

The textile arts are striving to fill the divide between "design" and "fine art", with constructive dialogue. For, to simply block up the space with interesting art would not be progressive. Paula Marincola refers to an exhibition curated by Alison Ferris in the Kohler Arts Centre. Ferris hoped that the exhibition would be *"a truly cohesive discussion of 'craft-related' materials and ideas, where materials and techniques are politicized and ideas are examined through the context of materials and techniques."* (Marincola, 1993, p. 39). The discussion, referred to openly, shows the shift from the autonomous art form that is in progress within the fibre section of fine art. In light of these changes, artists like Alice Kettle are fulfilling the aesthetic and emotional needs of a generation of people bored with the legacy of radical autonomous artforms.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have identified that in the space between art and craft exist artforms that have grown from both edges. I refer specifically to the relationship between textiles and fine art. But that union is just one of many. There are two routes from which the artists involved have reached this new textile-continent. There are artists trained as craftspeople, whether embroidery, weave or print, for whom the choice of designing for fashion or interiors was not a satisfying one. These artists craved the freedom of personal expression and, by using their craft skills to express their individually, they have entered the domain of fine art. By the very nature of their medium and their lack of training in fine art theory, which I believe lends a distinct aesthetic quality to their work, they have found the fine art institution reluctant to entertain them. On the other hand, craft was just as unwilling to back down and make room. I feel these rejections were for the best, as to simply to become a conceptual form of craft, or a craft-based fine art, would not do justice to the diversity of this exciting new progeny.

There are artists who have arrived by means of a different agenda. These are fine artists, who have picked up on the many themes inherent in textiles as a medium. Allison Ferris says: *"Artists have discovered that textiles has an incredible social history that hasn't yet been explored and they can bring their material exploration together with conceptual content and have it be effective."* (Marincola, 1995, p. 37). These textile artists have found it less of a problem to justify their textile medium, although it has aroused curiosity from the fine art community. *"How and why are so many contemporary fine artists interested in using textiles? ... Why are we seeing this proliferation of fabric-orientated exhibitions within institutional precincts not usually associated with fabric?"* (Marincola, 1995, p. 35). The answer is that these textile artists have realised the validity of textiles as a conceptual medium but the implications are much wider.

When the theory of modernism took on equal importance with the art of that time, fine art became the artists struggle to create a piece of work that existed primarily as a supreme aesthetic experience. *"A painting should compel the viewer to see it for what it is ... a certain arrangement of colours and forms on a canvas."* (Wolfe, 1975, p. 9). The struggle was valid at that time and the various questions that arose needed to be exhausted, but modernism is now perceived by most to be over. Each avenue of enquiry has been pushed to its limits. That is why fine artists have turned to other areas of investigation. But this exploration cannot be called fine art; textiles has too powerful a history to become another fine-art dimension.

Plate No. 10

One artist who has found in textiles a lifetime pursuit is Alice Kettle. Trained as a painter, she chose embroidery as a medium to establish her unique identity. While enjoying her tactile process, her inspiration comes from the painters of the past, Matisse, Giotto, Hodgkin. She is, to all purposes, still a painter herself. But she no longer holds a brush. Colour and form take shape through the eye of the sewing-machine needle. Kettle also has the capability to express herself verbally. She explains her emotional processes, inspirations and choice of medium very aptly. Most of the articles I have quoted from in relation to her work were written by Kettle herself. This aspect to Kettle's career, I feel, is an integral part of her success.

That is why I reached back in time to the days of **Der Blaue Reiter** and the production of the almanac. All of the processes I see emerging within textile art were once exploited by Kandinsky and Marc with veritable success. Firstly, it was artists writing about art. This was primarily to make sure there could be no misunderstanding about what the artist wanted to say. But it had another advantage also; through compiling their aims in a written format, the way forward became more apparent. Secondly, the artists had no reservations about gathering research from the past and placing themselves within an evolutionary historical context. This put them in a position to theorise about their part in the future. Jan Janeiro, a textile artist and writer within this era, refers to the contemporary textile artist as *"connected to all those histories that have preceded us and very new because he or she is the synthesizer of our past with our present and, thus, the mother of our future."* (Janeiro, 1995, p. 6). The only aspect of **Der Blaue Reiter** that has not been taken on board by the textile artist of the 1990s is the joining of textile forces. There has been no establishment of a united

front; no one has called for a mass gathering of minds where each individual can put forward his or her theories without fear of contention. It is my suggestion that textile artists from every part of the globe - Japan, America, Europe - make greater use of the existing media in this, the end of the 20th. century, taking advantage of magazines, newspapers, television, radio, video and the burgeoning internet, to express and develop a cohesive theory for their new area of activity. As Jan Janeiro stated: "For textiles, now is the time." (Janeiro, 1995, p. 6).

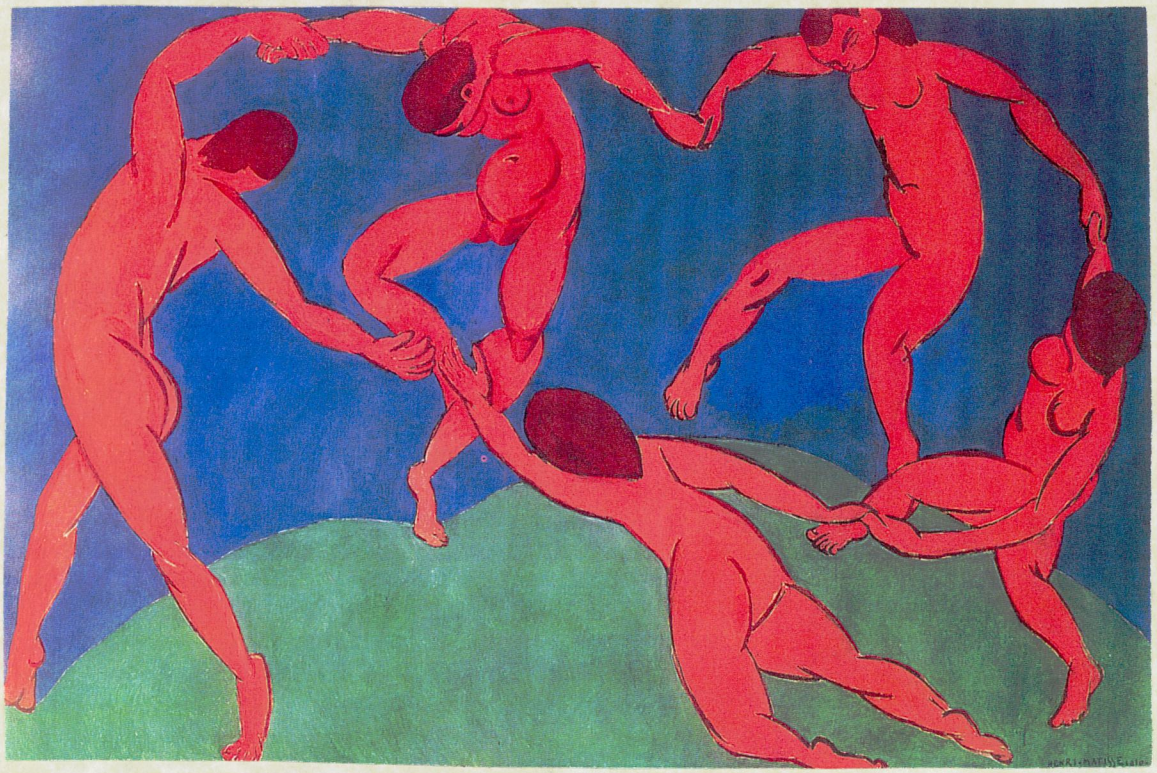


Plate No. 11

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