

Red Work

Rachael Howard

Methods and Processes

An initial study (see Item 8: Redwork Background and Context) was made of the examples of redwork quilts made in the 1880's, in the collections at The American Museum, Bath, and Deborah Harding's book *Red & White* (2000). When colourfast red dyed thread became affordable and readily available in the late 1880s, women used it to embroider their crisp white household textiles: dishcloths, towels and chair covers. The fashion spread to quilts made up of separate images patch-worked together. The images often referred to the use of the cloth they were stitched on, or told stories of everyday lives.

Red Work

Howard's *Red Work* pieces are a reinvention of these earlier techniques in a modern application. The first iteration of each image is a pencil sketch. The traditional redwork techniques are then combined with a range of techniques; machine embroidery, screen printing and digital printing. Abstract images made from found elements, fabric off-cuts, doodles, threads and printed scraps which are digitally enlarged add further depth to the images. (Enlarging these images to make backgrounds for images was explored further in a later work, entitled *Rainbow Joggers*, part of *The Wit of the Stitch* exhibition).

Blue Red Work

Colourfast blue thread was the next to become easily available during the 1890s and was quickly taken up for redwork. Using larger 50 x 50cm squares, which move from red shades into blue shades and then a mix of red and blue in the last third of the wall hanging, Howard's series *Blue Red Work* draws attention to this shift.

Red Work: Dogs and Cats

Similar to the original purpose of redwork to enliven standard household linens, the *Cats and Dogs* images were tested on a series of contemporary textiles including cushions. Unlike the conventional repeat print patterns or block colours the cats and dogs rely on a simplicity and individuality of hand making to communicate simple messages.

Experiments with household linen:

Experiments were done with other household linens, such as tea towels and handkerchiefs. Also, a range of covered buttons was made at a much smaller scale using screen print on to silk satin 6 x 6cm.