

ALISON SNEPP
LIVING TREASURES EXHIBITION - Gallery 5, 1-28 November 2022



I worked at the shop on Saturdays and in the school holidays. During this time, I met so many embroiderers, many of whom I still see today. After graduating I worked for the Australian Consumers' Association, but still spent every moment I could embroidering and sewing, spinning, weaving and dyeing.

Around 1979 I joined the Embroiderers' Guild NSW and decided to undertake the Proficiency Certificate specialising in Counted Thread Embroidery. At this time, I began my self-employment career and supported myself by dressmaking for clients, teaching a weekly class at Waverley-Woolollahra Arts Centre, and designing and working embroideries for private clients and advertising agencies. It was a time of very varied undertakings and I survived with the philosophy of never saying "No" to anything. I just got on with it and did it. The result was many, many late nights. And on top of all that were the extensive demands of the Proficiency Certificate. The support of Pat Langford, Heather Joynes and Ann Baker was indispensable. And I passed – with a Distinction!

The Guild was most supportive when I began my teaching career. Over the next few years, I taught Guild and community groups all around New South Wales. In 1984 I was awarded a study grant from the Guild and another from the Creative Embroidery Association and I went to England to study for three months. I undertook workshops with Valerie Campbell-Harding, Mary Rhodes, Dorothy Tucker, Maureen Pallister and Betty Beeby. I spent hours studying at the Victoria & Albert and in other museums.

On my return to Australia, I continued to teach and was invited to teach at the Wanaka Workshops in New Zealand. Teaching engagements, magazine articles, books and commissions gave me a varied and interesting worklife.

From 1990 I spent a couple of years working as Senior Product Manager for the Hard Craft Division of DMC. This division introduced ranges of paints, brushes, glues, sprays related to folk art and other hard crafts onto the Australian market. While I still don't love paints and glues, it added to my overall experience.

I have been an embroiderer since I was a small child and I learned many basic skills from my mother, who was always sewing. She made all our clothes, and the sewing machine was always out on her sewing table. She taught my sister, Sue, and I to use it, so that if we fiddled with it, we wouldn't break it!

I made my own clothes as well as dolls' clothes and toys. When I was about twelve years old, I made myself one of the clown dolls that were popular in the early 1960s. The mother of a friend liked them and asked me to make a number of them for her so my friend could give them out as birthday presents. My first commission.

In 1974 Stadia Handcrafts opened in Paddington specialising in the cross stitch and canvas work embroidery from the Danish Handcraft Guild. I was at university completing a Bachelor of Arts degree and



Counted Thread Bag. I made this bag during lockdown. I played around stitching slips of leftover linen scraps and then put them all together in a collage which I then made up into a workbag large enough to carry my embroidery frame. The fabrics are all linens, the threads are all cottons.

In 1992 I was appointed Craft Editor for Bay Books, which at that time was a division of Harper Collins Publishers. Later, I was Craft Editor for Murdoch Books. My designs and articles were published regularly in **Handmade Magazine, Better Homes and Gardens** and **Inspirations**. I also had several books published during those years.

All through this time I ran a finishing and making-up service for several Sydney embroidery shops. I made up thousands of embroidered cushions and other items such as spectacle cases, bellpulls, waistcoats, banners, etc.

In 1997 I was offered the opportunity to become the owner of Mosman Needlecraft, one of Sydney's oldest embroidery specialist shops. It was an exciting time to build the business, establish an extensive range of workshops and classes, find interesting new fabrics, threads, kits and accessories to appeal to embroiderers, and to introduce an annual program of lectures with specialists from Australia and abroad.

During the refurbishment of St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney and in preparation for World Youth Day I was commissioned to design and make four canvaswork cushions for the altar precinct at the Cathedral. I worked with four embroiderers and a professional finisher to bring the project to fruition before the visit of the Pope.

In 2005, my husband and I moved to Oberon, in the central west of New South Wales. We sold Mosman Needlecraft and I expanded my embroidery teaching practice. As my interest in embroidery from India, Greece, northern Africa and Central Asia grew, I developed and taught work influenced by these interests at various Guilds and community groups. I had a very full schedule teaching all around Australia, New Zealand and England. Everywhere I went I studied embroidery in museums and private collections and expanded my knowledge.

I decided to retire from teaching in 2019 after 39 years. I had always had a dream to lead an embroidery tour to England and at the end of 2019 I was fortunate to be able to bring that to life. With the practical help of my sister, Sue, we took fourteen keen embroiderers to England. We visited lots of places. In the planning phase, it seemed that every time there was a gap for 'an afternoon at leisure' I filled it and we organised to see more. It was



Shisha Cap. The cap is mirror work and surface stitchery. The fabric is linen; the threads are cotton broder 16 and T70 silver colour; the mirrors are glass; and the spangles are silver. It has cotton interfacing and lining.

an exciting tour with a wonderfully enthusiastic group of embroiderers.

In 2020 I returned to Sydney, and I am still in the process of adjusting to city life. I am stitching – probably more keenly than ever. My project size has changed, and I am now embroidering larger projects. I am interested in working on pieces that will be upholstered onto furniture. And I am also enjoying being able to use my stash, as you would imagine, I have quite a stash after all these years doing what I have done. Now I can use what I have, and I don't have to keep a record of colours or quantities used – I can just enjoy it!

Through all of my career in our wonderful world of embroidery the Embroiderers' Guild NSW has been a strong presence. I have taught classes, attended classes, given lectures and attended lectures, helped with correspondence courses, judged competitions and shows and most important of all, I have enjoyed the friendship of the members of the Guild.

Alison Snapp

Editor's note: On **MAG Day** on **9 November**, we will be celebrating Alison as a **Guild Treasure**. Do not miss, what promises to be, a truly wonderful event.



'Designer's Compendium'. This is the last workshop that I taught. The journal is two-way counted pattern darning using Gumnut silk Buds on evenweave linen. The design is based on the ceiling of the Ince Minare Museum in Konya, Turkey.

MORE EXAMPLES OF ALISON'S WORK



Above: Suzani Footstool, 2020 - a footstool with embroidered upholstery fabric. The fabric is linen and all the threads are Gumnut Silk Buds.

Below: Suzani Footstool detail



Three of the miniature brooches that I embroidered for an exhibition during lockdown. The left one is based on a quilt, the middle one is based on an ikat design, and the right hand one is inspired by rays of light being refracted through a prism. All are worked on 48-count silk gauze with silk threads.