A style.

colour notes and the gradual evolution of
guide, the drawings, reference photos,
image, the cartoon that is used as a
colour that makes tapestry so compelling
weave with, to create the plump pixels of
spacings of the warp across the frame,
onto the frame. Then the weaving of
together is, first, the winding of the warp
The practicality of bringing a tapestry
the creation of a tapestry?

What preparation do you undertake in
tone and colour and looking at texture. In
trips to Hawkins Hill. I wove a study first,
completed en plein air, after a number of
years. It was also one of the last woven in
the largest weaving I have undertaken in
Hawkins Hill is a studio work, probably

The mechanics of tapestry weaving have
cultures, and modern weavers are not
constrained by tradition, to incorporate
these devices in their work. It’s an area
I hope to explore further over future
work. I also played with “flying needles”,

climbs the length of the warp. So it is built
around the bulk of the landscape, rather
than its biological details.

You have described woven tapestry as a
process that builds an image by degrees.

When drawing or painting, the artist
generally works across the entire space
of the image, gradually building the work
up to bring the concept into focus. With
woven tapestry, the image is built from
the bottom up, each pick adding to the
one that had gone before, as the tapestry
climbs the length of the warp. So it is built
degrees.

However, the artist needs to approach
a concept in a similar way to traditional
media. This could be painting, collage
and digital manipulation of photos. I
have found that drawing designs that
later become cartoons for weaving in the
landscape gives my image a location, and
a connection that feeds the meditation of
the process.

In creating your woven tapestry Hawkins
Hill 2019, you experimented with
different weaving techniques. How was it
made?

Hawkins Hill is a studio work, probably
the largest weaving I have undertaken in
years. It was also one of the last weavings
in the series. The design is from a drawing
I completed on plein air, after a number of
trips to Hawkins Hill. I wove a study first,
allowing mistakes to happen, investigating
tone and colour and looking at texture. In

the larger tapestry, I decided to suggest
a whisper of perspective using texture.
The easiest way to create textures is to
effectively double the sett. In this work, I
wove sections over and under two warp
threads instead of one. I also used a
drawing technique called soumac, which is a half-

in-weaving embroidery.

In some of your tapestries, such as
Wombool (2016), you have experimented with different materials
such as paper, wool and fibres.

Wombool is a little bit political. It was
created around the time that the mining
company Regis Resources wanted to
purchase water from the Bathurst Council,
depriving the Macquarie River - Wombool
of a vast amount of water. During this
drought, water is an even more precious
existential resource for us all, and this
tapestry is still very relevant.

To indicate water usage, I looked at fibres
that suggested its use. Cotton is obvious,
so is wool. I thought about forests and
logging and used paper - kozo paper
and tea bags hand-spun. I used nettle
string to suggest weeds introduced since
colonisation, horse-hair yarn to suggest
hard-hoofed livestock, raffia for grazing.
The river is woven using horse hair, bovine
tail hair and stainless steel wrapped in
wool. All these are resilient fibres, weaving
a bit of hope into the concept.

The patchwork nature of the design
relates to the carving up of land, the
bureaucracy of acquisition that cares
little for natural processes. All these fibres
behaved differently in weaving, and were
a challenge to manipulate around the
work, particularly the nettle string. I used
the remnant of a decorative wire fence to
frame the work.

What advice would you give an
emerging textile artist?

Textiles are a broad church, everything
from reframing traditional and
ever-feeding hungry techniques, to
modern textiles and the manipulation of
fibres using the incredible scope of
the digital age. For me, it has been a natural
progression - not everything I conceive
becomes a textile-based work, but a lot of
case does.

Any exploration of a media relies on
first learning a technique, experimenting
with the fibres, techniques and patterns
of a technique, and then pushing it to
where you want to go. Textiles are no
different. Love what you do, explore
and play with what you have, and keep
drawing. Textiles are labour-intensive,
so you need to truly enjoy most of the
process. All the other tenants of the
artistic journey are there, and they
need to be nurtured, and textiles can be
a hugely satisfying branch of that journey
towards cultivation.
IN CONVERSATION

For Bathurst-based textile artist Heather Dunn, location – place – is important. Palette of Place showcases tapestries inspired by the landscape and colours of Hill End. Using dyes created from local organic materials, Dunn’s tapestries comprise rich ochres, wattle yellow and subtle shades of green. Their designs, drawn on plain air, reflect broad elements of the landscape, allowing the palette of the place to become the heroes of the composition. Here she discusses her practice and current exhibition, Palette of Place, with BRAG curator Emma Collerton.

EMMA COLLERTON: In 2011, you graduated with a Diploma of Tapestry from Warrnambool TAFE. What drew you to the tapestry medium?

HEATHER DUNN: I have always been drawn to textiles, learning to spin when I was 15. Woven tapestries became a natural progression of the desire to make images and to incorporate textiles and fibres. Like a lot of human endeavour, woven tapestry has the ability to cross cultures and epochs. In textiles, India Flint’s botanical printing on cloth was a revelation to me around 2010. Drawing on her methods, I experimented and worked on finding my local palette around my own environment.

Can you identify some turning points in your career?

My second solo at Bathurst’s T.arts Gallery in 2016 made me realise that textiles could take a more prominent place in my skill set, with people responding to my work positively. I have found that by following a seam of inspiration, I can explore different processes and a theme over an extended period. Another turning point was completing my diploma. I studied art amongst the chaos of raising three teenagers. The course gave me structure and accountability that has continued into my work.

During your residency, you spent time gathering material, pigments and vegetation for dyeing and mark-making.

Spring in Hill End is a variable season. I checked the skies and the radio for the forecast each morning over breakfast and after giving Boris the magpie his bribe - he never swooped - I planned my day. If the wind was relatively calm, I lit the gas under a dye pot and got it bubbling away. I usually walked and collected and drew in the afternoon. It didn’t take me long to realise that pigment is everywhere to be found in Hill End. I had planned to weave in my response to Hill End was a huge turning point in my practice, in that it was a ‘a-ha’ moment. As the weeks went by, my palette grew, and the balls of yarn stacked on the mantlepiece were a secondary notation. I didn’t need a lot of material to dye the quantities of yarns that I had planned. The dried mistletoe leaves were the most painstaking, as they were long and brittle, and tucked away in the grass. Bark and dried leaves were then placed in a dye pot and broken up with a wooden spoon or broom handle, and then soaked. The next day, the dye stuff and the soaking water was boiled until I could see a release of pigment into the water. This liquid was strained into another pot, and it was ready for the yarn.

On the weaving side, there are many. One who does stand out is Cresside Collette and her spontaneous “en plein air” weaving that freed me from sticking to rigid cartoons. I didn’t have an opportunity to weave en plein air at Hill End, but most of my designs [cartoons] are drawn en plein air and woven straight from that.

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