

## Book Reviews

Please remember to mention Workshop on the Web when buying your books



**Leaf Stitching**  
**Alice Fox**  
**ISBN 978-0-9927051-1-4**  
**Price £15.00**  
**Available from Alice Fox**  
[www.alicefox.co.uk](http://www.alicefox.co.uk)

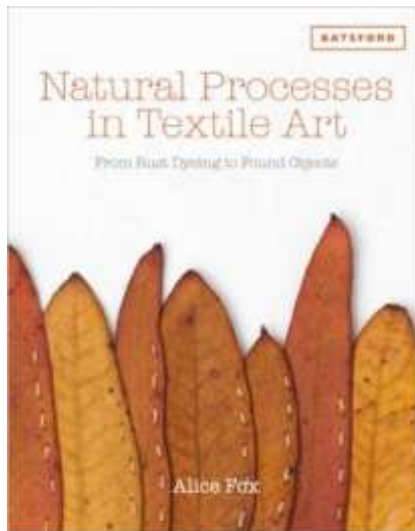
This book complements the wonderful Workshop that Alice has written for us in this issue. The article gives some context for the work featured in the book.

It is a series of photographs of leaves collected by Alice and stitched with care and delicacy. Beautifully photographed against white backgrounds, the tiniest detail is picked up by the camera and provides an extraordinary snapshot of the fragility of nature.

Each stitched piece of work is titled, with a few details of where the leaves were collected and what thread was used to stitch into it. There are leaf 'quilts', leaf lines, circles, patches and squares - all finished perfectly.

It is awe-inspiring that a little book of such simple ideas can evoke such feelings of joy but I think it is the simplicity that makes you want to read this over and over. It is such a beautiful idea to capture the shapes of different leaves and create new lines with them, to combine the colours of different stages in a life cycle and show the progression, or to painstakingly construct tiny books from sage leaves.

This book will make you want to go out for a walk and, rather than tramping through the Autumnal leaves - you will stop and look at what's on the ground and start to notice the treasures that are all around. With a large supply, you might find yourself reaching for a needle and thread and making some stitched leaves of your own.



### **Natural Processes in Textile Art**

**Alice Fox**

**ISBN 978-1-84994-298-0**

**Published by Batsford**

**[www.pavilionbooks.com](http://www.pavilionbooks.com)**

**Price £22.50/\$29.95**

Alice Fox's other recent publication through Batsford is a guide to working with nature's processes and natural found objects. This book, while containing a little of the material in the Leaf Stitching book, has a much wider subject-matter, incorporating many different techniques and ideas. As Alice's self published book (previous review) related directly to her article in this issue, we wanted to review them both. Its aim is to encourage the reader to look around at the wealth of textile processes that are available and to use them to try new and eco-friendly methods of mark-making on fabric and paper.

Split into six chapters, each dealing with a particular area, the book flows from one to another and forms a cohesive whole. It takes you from the basics of foraging, how to develop your skills in collecting objects, all the while taking a responsible attitude to the environment. This sets you up for the more specific chapters that follow, which focus on Natural Colour, Rusting or natural fibres. There is much information about mordants, wetting agents and methods of making marks. Again, the slowness of some of these techniques is repeated, with some rusting taking weeks or months to fully develop. Interspersed are examples of other artists and their work, giving an idea of how they work and what their artistic statements are. Artists such as India Flint, Claire Wellesley-Smith and Hannah Lamb share their work and thoughts and alongside Alice's, there is a wealth of work on display.

The chapter on 'Foraged Fibres' is linked to the Workshop she has written for this issue. It looks at leaf and grass plants and fibres and shows you unconventional ways of using them. Leaf Stitching is featured but you will be able to delve further into this subject by reading the article. If you liked Alice's Workshop, this book is a great addition. It is a gentle, thoughtful book about the beauty of the natural world and how that can be translated into our creative practices with relative ease.



**Stitch Stories**  
**Personal Places, Spaces and Traces in Textile Art**  
**Cas Holmes**  
**ISBN 978-1-84994-274-4**  
**Published by Batsford**  
**[www.pavilionbooks.com](http://www.pavilionbooks.com)**  
**Price £22.50/\$29.95**

This book develops an idea that was first raised in Cas' book 'The Found Object in Textile Art' and looks more closely at how the world around you can be a starting point to develop your creative ideas. By making a connection to people or places, it becomes a way in to building a narrative using stitch. Each chapter looks at aspects of recording information, how inspiration can be seized upon, adding detail to your work and telling a story.

Dealing with ways of recording your travels or observations is addressed early on. We are given a wide view of the benefits of gathering information by journal, sketching, stitching, recording with digital media and mark-making. There are checklists and suggestions of how to approach these.

This book is all about finding inspiration and translating your experiences into textile art. There are exercises and mini-workshops, providing a wide range of techniques to try out, including wet appliqué, low-water immersion dyeing, mono-printing, transfer paints and printing. All are presented with photos of Cas' work.

The exercises and tutorials are cocooned within a much broader exploration of what it is to create textile art that is meaningful to you, your community and the world. The book is infused with the ideas and thoughts of a group of textile artists, all of whom have a connection to people, places or objects and who communicate their feelings through their art. They range from a view of the world the artist sees (Anne Kelly, Noriko Endo), an affinity to the environment that develops into work over a period of time (Holly Story), recycling and upcycling (Peta Lloyd) or social activism (Mary Fisher). These are only a handful of the artists featured and all the work is beautifully selected.

It is a highly absorbing read and I don't think you will even break the surface after one read.



**Layer, Paint and Stitch**  
**Create Textile Art using Freehand Machine Embroidery and Hand Stitching**  
**Wendy Dolan**  
**ISBN 978-1-78221-074-0**  
**Published by Search Press**  
[www.searchpress.com](http://www.searchpress.com)  
**Price £17.99/\$35.00**

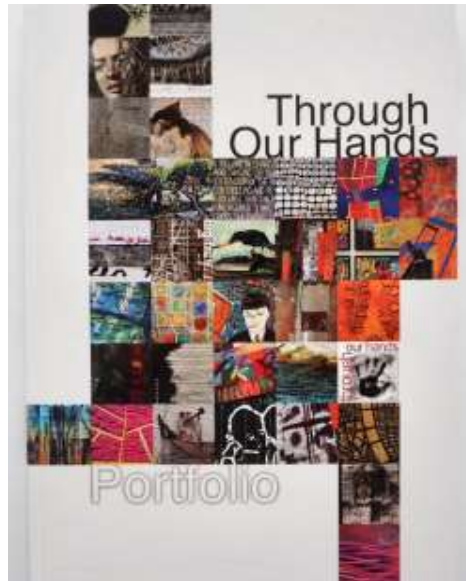
Wendy Dolan's book is the latest in 'The Textile Artist' series from Search Press, which explores the work of some of the best textile artists working today. Wendy's book 'Layer, Paint and Stitch' focuses on stitch, both by machine and hand. Anyone who has seen and admired Wendy's work will see this book as a fantastic opportunity to learn from her techniques and see how she creates such wonderfully textured pieces.

Attention is given at the start to the materials you will use, colour and inspiration but with some further detail on freehand machine stitching, a welcome addition. The hand stitches used are fairly common but presented as parts of stitched pieces of work, so that you can see the effects of different stitch sizes, colours and combinations. Under the 'Design' section, a variety of approaches are covered, such as montage, paper collage and drawing - all give an insight into how you can work in this style. What really struck me about Wendy's approach was the amount of work that was done from the back of the piece. In order to use Cable Stitch, the bobbin thread needs to be seen and so there is a lot of working blind from behind.

The Projects are divided into four – Flowers, Architecture, Landscapes and Three Dimensional Inspiration. All offer several projects and a Gallery of work at the end. It is in these projects that you appreciate the different processes that are described earlier and see how they come together. I loved the collaged backgrounds which are stitched and then painted, with further heavier stitching on top to create Summer Meadow. The architectural pieces too were fascinating, from the methods Wendy uses to transfer the design from behind whilst framing the motifs perfectly from the front, to the use of colour and texture to create a richly stitched surface.

This book contains a range of stitching (changing the emphasis from vertical to horizontal stitching). Painting the fabric in different areas brings colour, but creates atmosphere and shading which is very effective, particularly in the architectural pieces. To finish, there are some amazing three-dimensional pieces and some amazing Urban Landscape structures. Wendy's approach is fascinating and this makes it a very rich book for the art of textiles.





**Through Our Hands**  
Curated and Edited by  
Annabel Rainbow, Laura Kemshall  
Published by Through Our Hands  
[www.throughourhands.co.uk](http://www.throughourhands.co.uk)

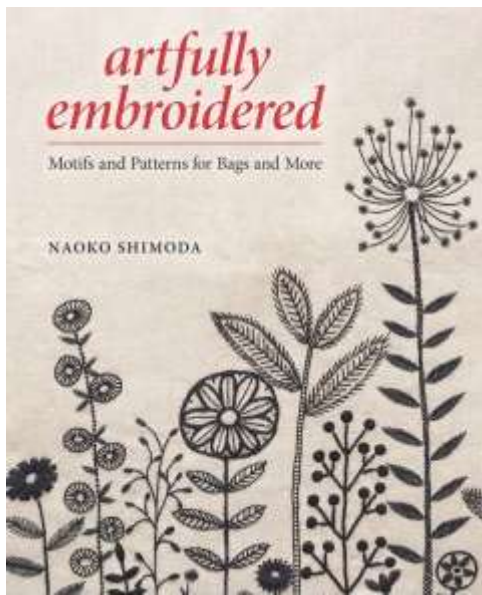
**Price £10.00 plus p&p**

This book is a wonderful source of inspiration, containing excellent photos of the work of leading textile artists from around the world. Through our Hands is a collaboration of artists working in a wide variety of media, from print and paint to all forms of stitched textiles. The artists have been selected by Laura Kemshall and Annabel Rainbow, the founders of the organisation, and they have made such good choices that there is sure to be something here for everyone. Much of the work in the book was on show at the recent Festival of Quilts in Birmingham, England, but this book is much more than just a catalogue. I have to confess an interest here as I was delighted to be asked to write the Foreword for the book. I shall try to be objective.

Each artist has a double page spread – sometimes more – in which they talk about their work and motivation. Large photographs allow readers to get a feel for the textiles and make their words come to life. Alicia Merrett, Sue Stone, Sara Impey and Michala Gyetvai have also contributed additional feature articles in which their work is covered in more depth.

Of the work in the book, space prohibits the mention of more than just a few of my favourites: Laura's large quilts, often produced as printed digital images, have no sense of being produced in this sometimes rather soulless manner. The quantity of stitch transforms them and imbues them with a sense of a story well told. Annabel's work – those amazing women, many with their life story stitched onto their bodies – are shown in good clear photos – powerful images.

Other favourite pages are those by Sandra Meech, with her heat-transfer collages, Susan Lenz with stunning installations and the Dementia Darnings of Jenni Dutton – amazing studies of her mother, attacked by the disease. But all the artists are first class and all have interesting things to say.



**Artfully Embroidered**  
**Motifs and Patterns for Bags and More**  
**Naoko Shimoda**  
**ISBN 978-1-62033-728-8**  
**Published by Interweave**  
[www.interweave.com](http://www.interweave.com)  
**Price £16.99/\$24.99**

Artfully Embroidered embraces the current enthusiasm for contemporary hand-stitching techniques and combines this with making unusual and unique bags and purses.

Naoko Shimoda approaches the book with a modern interpretation of Vintage Embroidery, using traditional Japanese and Western motifs but injecting them with new colour, embellishments and vigour.

It is primarily a bag-making book but what makes it interesting is that the emphasis is placed on not just how it's put together, but how it can be decorated too - each bag is made in a particular style with stitching that finishes off the look perfectly. The beautiful embroideries combine with stylish bag patterns so you get a contemporary feel without any dowdiness.

There are totes, structured bags, purses and also embroidered hankies and clothes but none of the designs are run-of-the-mill. There is a range of bag shapes that would suit every look and the embroideries are well thought out to complement each one. The embroideries range from the simple use of sequins or raffia flowers to more complex floral embroidery patterns, using 22 different stitches and five other techniques. There are full instructions on the best way to embroider for this purpose, to reinforce with interfacings or using water-soluble canvas. Particularly useful is the description of the variety of interfacings and where and when to use them, either for stitching or bag construction, to strengthen most effectively. Instructions on bag construction are illustrated and easy to understand, ranging from simple affairs to sizeable projects with handmade gussets and handles.

Given the variety of bags and looks, it would be easy to find something to suit your own personal style. Add the good number of stitches to practice, it's a great way of finding something new to try and feed your inner Vintage Diva!



**Surface Design for Fabric**  
**Kimberly A. Irwin**  
**ISBN 978-1-60901-885-6**  
**Published by Bloomsbury**  
[www.bloomsbury.com](http://www.bloomsbury.com)  
**Price £50.00**

This book is an exhaustive manual for anyone wanting to learn more about decorative techniques for fabric. Aimed at fashion (predominantly) students, it has enough techniques included to benefit textile artists and those interested in the subject.

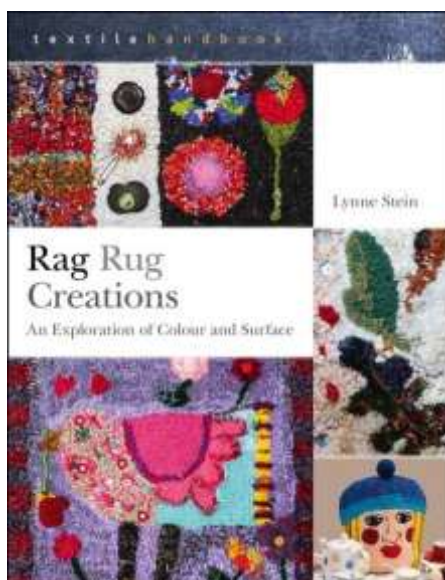
The two main substrates it focuses on are fabric and leather. The latter makes very interesting reading because it is not something you see widely covered in books on a regular basis. There is a good background section given at the start of each section to provide an excellent starting point for taking each technique further.

As it is written in the form of an educational manual, all the pertinent information you need to know is set out in a clear and informative way, with some history, tables, colour charts and details of additional resources. A good background section given at the beginning of each chapter to provide an excellent starting point for taking each technique further.

Under Dyeing, subjects range from Rusting, Staining to Earth and Grass Staining. For Discharging Colour and Resists, we have everything from Batik, Potato Dextrin, Shibori and RIT. Other chapters cover Printing and Transfer, Fiber Manipulation, Fabric Manipulation, Embroidery and Embellishment.

Although, with some of the latter chapters, you may find other authors cover these subjects more specifically, there is a large amount of ground covered. I liked the way that each chapter looks at specific artists or fashion designers that have employed a technique, analysing how they have done it and the effect created. There are photographs of garments or fabrics showing the process, illustrated instructions of each technique and details of suppliers.

So, if you want to know how to marble or smock fabric, needle-felt a ball, tool leather or print with cyanotype - look no further.



**Rag Rug Creations**  
**An Exploration of Colour and Surface**  
**Lynne Stein**  
**ISBN 978-1-4081-5756-5**  
**Published by Bloomsbury**  
**[www.bloomsbury.com](http://www.bloomsbury.com)**  
**Price £16.99**

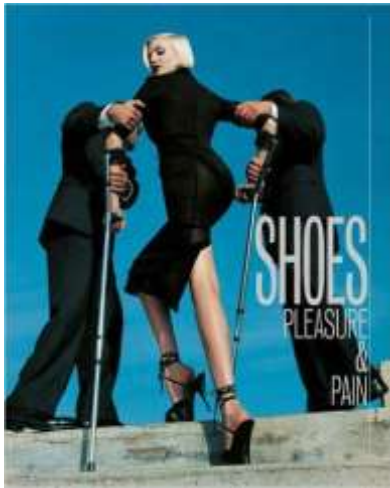
Rag Rugs are centuries old and this book looks at the techniques used to create them.

It starts with a look at the history of Rag Rugs, drawing on art forms such as mosaics and pointillism to place it firmly within the sphere of artistic approaches. It is a fascinating section, looking at the origins of rug making, where they were made as part of a community effort. There has been very little historical documentation and exposure, probably due to it being undervalued as a craft form, but Lynne Stein provides an interesting introduction. In the 20th Century, artist Winifred Nicholson (wife of Ben Nicholson) became involved with an initiative to encourage local interest and designed 180 rugs, made up by local women resourcing mill clippings for bright colours. It is this chapter which goes into a lot more detail about the history, making this book such a good read.

If you are unfamiliar with rug-making or have only previously come across kits using latch tools, then you will find a great deal of information about the surprisingly diverse range of techniques used to create rugs. From hooking, pulling, needle-felting, braiding, all manner of methods are explained. Encouragement is given to the reader to upcycle and recycle, being directed to car boot sales and charity shops for inexpensive resources.

The projects are quirky and fun, using mostly recycled materials and plastic bags and include not only rugs but a draught excluder, Allotment Veggie Markers, Christmas Stocking and a Flower Garland. For a book that might be viewed with prejudice, this opens up a new world of crafting and certainly made me realise that there is a lot more to making rugs than I had previously thought.





**Shoes**  
**Pleasure and Pain**  
**Edited by Helen Persson**  
**ISBN 978-1-85177-832-4**  
**Published by V&A Books**  
[www.vandashop.com](http://www.vandashop.com)  
**Price £20**

This book has been published to accompany the exhibition at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London running until January 2016. It turns on its head the notion that the exhibition is about weird and wacky shoes and our love of vertiginous heels, being an in-depth study of the socio-historical placements of shoes through time and the shoe as a symbol of power, decadence, fetishism and usefulness.

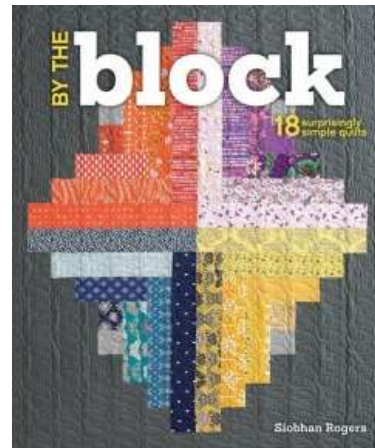
The book is structured into three parts – The Allure of Shoes, Art and Innovation and Shoe Obsession. Each chapter within each part covers a different aspect of the subject matter. The epicentre of the book is based around the notion that humans have constantly strived to make life easier for themselves, yet the shoe seems to have consistently stepped outside the boundaries. Shoes have denoted privilege and power, reflecting a more leisurely lifestyle through the ages rather than unilaterally existing to protect the foot whilst the wearer moves around, working to survive.

The book studies, through a series of essays and photographs, footwear through the ages from Greek idealised beauties, an expression of individuality of Iberian women, through to the many changes that occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It is interesting that the notion of women being 'slaves to fashion' is not a contemporary phenomenon but something that has also existed as far back as the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, when the popularity of higher heels started to flourish. There are case studies of several striking shoe forms, such as the ballet shoe. Associations of ballerinas' grace and elegance is set against the harshness and injuries caused by 'points'. We see Christian Louboutin's 'Ballerina Ultima' shoes, impossible to stand or walk in but which capture perfectly the blurred line between shoes as footwear and an object of art.

This is a fabulous book that covers all aspects of the shoe as an icon of beauty and power through time and brings us bang up to date with where we are now. It is thought-provoking and a lot more than a girlish celebration of beautiful, if painful, shoes. If you are planning on visiting the exhibition it is worth trying to read this first. You will find that your appreciation of the shoes on display may run a lot deeper than their aesthetic beauty.

*Red ballet shoes made for Victoria Page (Maira Shearer) in The Red Shoes (1948), silk satin, braid and leather, England. Photograph reproduced with the kind permission of Northampton Museums and Art Gallery.*

**By the Block**  
**18 Surprisingly Simple Quilts**  
**Siobhan Rogers**  
ISBN 978-1-62033-676-2  
Published by Interweave  
[www.interweave.com](http://www.interweave.com)  
Price £17.99/\$26.99



'By the Block' is written by someone who has always had a lot on her plate. Siobhan Rogers describes her early years of quilting, with a small baby, university degree to finish and a quilting shop to run. So from that period of time, the author is all-to-aware of being 'time-poor' - something which probably applies to most of us here. The quilts included are all suitable for those of us that need something simple to work on but have high standards.

There are 18 quilt patterns which use repeated blocks or units and you can choose from themes of squares, half-square triangles, crosses, triangles, log cabin and curved pieces. Full instructions are given for each theme with further details of how to construct and finish a quilt. All the designs are striking with a good mix of traditional and modern and some retro in-between. The added bonus is that if it looks fabulous but its construction fits into a busy life.

**Millie Marotta's Tropical Wonderland**  
**A colouring book adventure**  
**Millie Marotta**  
ISBN 978-1-84994-285-0  
Published by Batsford  
[www.pavilionbooks.com](http://www.pavilionbooks.com)  
Price £9.99



If you have already finished Millie Marotta's 'Animal Kingdom' and your fingers are twitching for some more, then look no further than her latest creation. There are a huge number of these kinds of colouring books on the market at the moment but I find the illustrations of Millie Marotta take it to the next level. They are sophisticated, mouth-wateringly beautiful and guaranteed to keep you quiet for hours. In 'Tropical Wonderland', you can really let a love of colour run riot with butterflies, exotic birds, fish and an iguana, as well as lush foliage and flowers. I used the Spectrum Noir Aqua pens as watercolour paints (see Product Reviews) so the excellent quality of the paper need not restrict you in the colouring medium of your choice. Fabulous to bring a bit of summer colour back now that autumn is upon us.