

or the weekends – or as Knott puts it: ‘The alternate temporal modality known as amateur time’.

At the recent *London Design Festival*, the trend forecasting agency The Future Laboratory showed a film it had made proclaiming the age of anti-authenticity. Its contention was that the word ‘craft’ was being used by so many global brands in their marketing that it no longer contained any meaning.

If nothing else, Knott’s book is a timely reminder of craft’s breadth and everyday importance.

Grant Gibson is the editor of Crafts

Textiles of recovery and repair

What Do I Need To Do To Make It OK?
Pump House Gallery, Battersea Park, London SW11
27 August – 1 November 2015
Reviewed by Jessica Hemmings

How to make amends – physical or emotional – is a rich starting point for an exhibition theme. Here, the phrase borrowed for the exhibition title is taken from a 2013 lecture given by the Canadian artist Dorothy Caldwell. The ambiguity of the reference is easier on the ear than the eye, but it has allowed curator Liz Cooper to draw on a number of disparate practices (Caldwell, Saidhbhín Gibson, Celia Pym, Freddie Robins, Karina Thompson) that aim to explore ‘damage and repair, disease and medicine, healing and restoration, to landscapes, bodies, minds and objects’.

Caldwell’s works suggest abstract landscapes recorded, repaired and mended. Their atmosphere is contemplative: muted colours assembled from materials that could have been harvested from the very landscapes and skies they capture. I am reminded of nature’s tireless and so often under-acknowledged cycle of regrowth. But the exhibition theme makes for schizophrenic musing. Caldwell’s approach, for example, could not be more different from Robins’s. *Basket Case* graces the exhibition announcement and greets viewers on the ground floor. Enjoying the dark humour that has long appeared in Robins’s practice, the sad, knitted face is suspended across a beaded net – a bit like a big red egg smashed by a gold tennis



Above: *Comfort of Fog*, Dorothy Caldwell, plant dyed cotton, applique, stitch, 45.7 x 35.5cm, 2013
Below: *I’m so bloody sad*, Freddie Robins, machine knitted wool, foam, sand, knitting needles, 98 x 210cm, 2007-15

racquet – memorialised on a pedestal of basketry. But it is Robins’s disarmingly confessional *I’m So Bloody Sad* that made the most thought-provoking response to the exhibition theme for me. Knit in grey with a lumpen block of a body and limbs extended with knitting needle tips, the figure’s head is thrown back, utterly incapable of looking forward. *I’m So Bloody Sad* stands out, ironically, because of its refusal to suggest recovery. *Not* mending, *not* repairing and *not* saying that things can ever be made good again



conveys an intensely private sentiment all will have felt at one point in life, but few share so explicitly.

In a similarly contrary way, Celia Pym’s wall of darned socks do not disguise the artificiality of their repair. Of the 60 socks exhibited, precious few are stitched in places familiar to wear-and-tear, such as heels and toes. Instead, a jolly cancer (if such an oxymoron can be uttered) seems to populate the entire wall. In contrast to the muted, natural aesthetic of Caldwell, Pym seems to relish a synthetic over-growth and over-repair.

What troubles me about this exhibition is that we are presented with *representations* of ‘repair’. Perhaps Pym comes closest to the real thing when offering up the therapy of stitch during her *Parallel Practices* residency with Dr Richard Wingate and medical students working in the Dissecting Room of King’s College London (see *Crafts* issue no. 253, March/April 2015). And, of course, Caldwell’s almost eponymous contribution dwells on piecing and assembly. But these practices suffer from familiarity. Considering that this is an exhibition of makers, the collective message feels curiously fixed, both physically as objects as well as conceptually in response to an almost limitless topic. Rejections of recovery and

representations of repair surely deserve to be placed alongside the actual act of ‘making it OK?’ The alternative narrative would be that we can’t, which I don’t believe is the intention.

The first venue, Pump House Gallery, is an eccentric space: four floors demand that the exhibition is sliced and separated. Cooper has astutely selected works with material relationships, separating examples of exhibiting artists across floors. In our cash-poor times, the funding secured and panel of experienced advisors on hand for the development of this project are commendable. Arts Council England funding has allowed for new commissioned work by the five exhibiting artists. As more of the commissioned work emerges during the exhibition tour, the personality and relationships of the show are bound to shift. But a greater diversity of voices from the outset may have shed more unexpected light on an exhibition theme so full of potential.

Professor Jessica Hemmings is head of the faculty of Visual Culture at the National College of Art & Design, Dublin.

‘What Do I Need To Do To Make It OK?’ tours to Crafts Study Centre, Farnham; Devon Guild of Craftsmen; Forty Hall; The National Centre for Craft & Design, and Rugby Art Gallery & Museum

Wallpaper show has it covered

W is for Wallpaper
Ruthin Craft Centre, Denbighshire
26 September – 22 November
Reviewed by Emma Crichton-Miller

W is for Wallpaper is that marvellous thing, an exhibition of national scope and resonance, conceived and presented in the provinces. It should be on the itinerary of anyone interested in contemporary print-making, design or the currently fertile interface between hand-craft and digital technologies.

Jane Audas and Gregory Parsons, in an inspired collaboration suggested by Ruthin’s Philip Hughes, have scoured the British Isles, coming up with a show that ranges from the doyenne of hand-drawn, hand-printed linocut wallpapers, Marthe Armitage, still working in her 80s, to recent graduates Claire Florey-Hitchcox and George Malychkyi. Both in their early 20s, Florey-Hitchcox is a meticulous and

exquisite hand-carved wood block printer, while Malychkyi deploys hand silk-screen printing, hand flocking and foiling and digital embroidery to give exuberant life to his bold patterns. You can even add supplementary magnetic badges.

The curators’ ambition has been simply to represent the best of contemporary small-batch or entirely hand-made wall-paper. And while honouring wallpapers conceived and printed, even sewn and gilded, by hand, they have also embraced digital experimentation. Even William Morris, to whom this show inevitably pays homage, in ethos as much as imagery, urged designers of wallpapers to ‘accept their mechanical nature frankly, to avoid falling into the trap of trying to make your paper look as if it were painted by hand’.

These papers vary greatly in concept. Claire Coles’s bespoke, hand-collaged and embroidered paper, created especially for this show, was designed in response to an imaginary commission from textile millionaire Stephen Courtauld and his wife Virginia for their 1930s refurbishment of Eltham Palace. It features, amid curling tree branches, a fabric portrait of the couple’s beloved pet ring-tailed lemur, Mah-Jongg. Meanwhile, persistent innovator Deborah Bowness, is showing two contrasting and colourful wallpapers created from her own photographs, digitally printed.

That this is not a trade show, but an art exhibition, is indicated the moment you walk into Ruthin’s magnificent angular white exhibition space. The papers hang from the walls but not quite flush with them and in vertical sweeps from hanging bars to plinths in the centre of the room. You are invited to inspect each single strip as an individual creation, admiring the intricacy of Rachel Kelly’s lyrical laser-cut paper *Kyoto – Cut-Out*, or the sculptural presence of Tracy Kendall’s *In the White Room*, with strips of white paper stitched onto a white background.

All sensibilities are catered for, from wallpapers paying homage to English illustrators Edward Bawden and Eric Ravilious, to those dazzling contemporary masters of pattern, Eley Kishimoto. What Audas refers to as the luxurious ‘boudoir chic’ of Squint’s *Pink Obi* paper contrasts with the stylish geometric design of Kirath Ghundoo. Daniel Heath’s elegant art deco *Onyx Skyline* is a world away from Belynda Sharples’s hand-drawn Welsh sheep or All the Fruits’s witty wood effect, *Wood – Yellow*. Two wallpapers are papered to the wall so we can see how cleverly Mini Moderns have designed their strips to create a strong horizontal movement in the waves of their retro seascape, *Whitby*. Jonny Hannah for wallpaper and fabric maker St Jude’s



Omni Splatt,
Timorous Beasties, 2015

(represented here by three designers) has deftly arranged his hand-drawn design to require only one tricky cross-border join.

The art of wallpaper, as Morris knew profoundly, is all in the repeat. The curators have selected only those designers for whom this requirement is an inspiration, not a constraint, even if, as in the case of the wonderfully opulent Timorous Beasties paper, *Indie Wood*, the repeat is only every 10m. A final criterion is captured in Teleri Lloyd-Jones’s excellent catalogue essay: ‘The only rule is to make things well and with compassion’. Most of these papers thrill with their creative ingenuity and technical accomplishment; but they also warm the heart, because they emerge from long-term collaborations between designers and the factories who share their commitment to this craft.

Emma Crichton-Miller is a journalist and television producer specialising in the arts