

Space Drawings, 2013: Ann Sutton writes about her new work

New works

Drawings contain two-dimensional space between lines. Lines which project from the surface contain three-dimensional space which changes with the viewpoint and interacts with adjacent volumes. A fluid and invisible bas-relief is created, defined on the edges by the projecting lines. The aim is to trap and link space and movement with a series of projecting fibres, stiff but flexible.



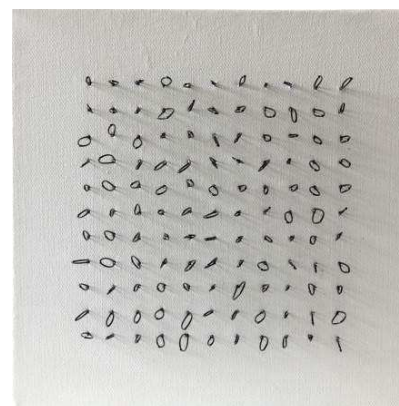
Sometimes these lines are striped or coloured to stutter the eye into moving faster across the changing surface of imprisoned spaces.

The lines suggest letter forms, and changing the viewpoint is like reading. But there is no text there except that which the eye invents. Lines made with pencil or brush are controlled by the brain and hand. Lines made by substance have their own will, and can surprise even the artist.

Background

'Lining things up' has been an unconscious interest for years. Friends ask why I sit with my arm extended, hand sideways, slowly dividing my fingers. It's because I am lining up my fingers with the edge of the skylight. Writing this, I am lining up the edge of the notebook with boards on the wall, to see what happens with the angles formed.

Looking through plant stems to the scene beyond, and seeing what happens if I move my head even slightly. The stems don't change much but the image in the space between alters greatly.



History



I seem to be completing a huge circle with this work.

In the sixties, the comparatively new plastics attracted me with their lack of history. Fresh properties, a public revulsion. Hurray.

I found that a certain thickness of monofilament nylon could pass through a hole drilled in the sheet equivalent, clear Perspex, and pass back again in not less than ½" (for it was flexible to a certain degree) and not more than 2" (longer than that and it became floppy). This resulted in a series of eight 24" square space-hung panels where the game was played out in different ways. (Seven of these were quickly sold to Terry Frost, V&A, Crafts Council, Welsh Arts Council, Whitworth Art Gallery and two other public collections. I kept the eighth, but sold it to the Sainsbury Centre during the exhibition there: "Pleasures of Peace"). I made no more.

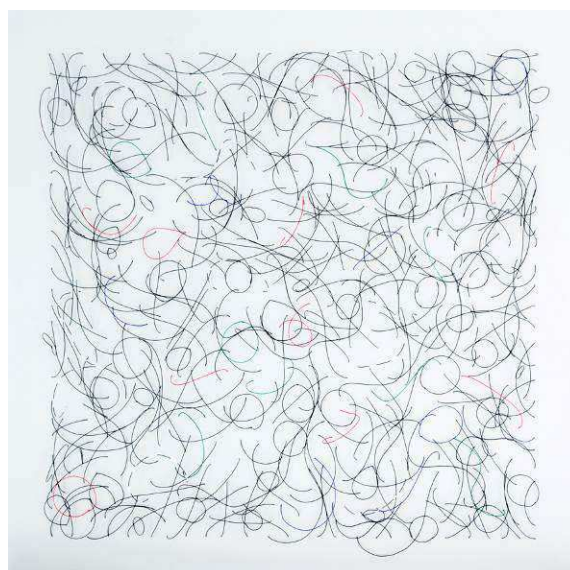
But another game in space was played using two short lengths of 1/4" thick black laminate (made for lido doors) which I placed face to face and drilled through both. Opening them up like the sides of a ladder I laced them through with monofilament, passing it through 'rungs' of black plastic tubing cut to lengths of 1", 2", 3", and revelling in the way in which the 1" lengths determined the width, and the longer lengths writhed between the two sides.

This led to investigations of number systems, followed by "Bristle Box" in which a 6" Perspex cube was marked on four opposing sides with an invisible Magic Square of the numbers 1 – 6, rotated once on each side. 12" long bristles of monofilament were passed across, linking numbers on each row with their partners on the row opposite, in numerical succession and alternating sides. The result was a set of 6 layers of unique woven structure.

It was exhibited in my solo show at the British Craft Centre in Earlham Street, in 1969, and I watched as three curators from the V&A spent two hours looking at it. It was priced at £25. They then explained that although they wanted it, they couldn't buy it because it wasn't a textile. (It was, in fact, the most original piece of weaving ever.) It went on immediately as a maquette to win the Welsh Arts Council Prize for sculpture and was eventually made on a much larger scale.

Bewitched by the woven structure, I spent the next few decades at looms of increasing complexity, for the last twenty years using CAD/CAM in my studio.

Now all the equipment has gone, and I am back to basics. Fascinated by line, time and movement. Seeing what happens - always a valid reason for making.



Ann Sutton's new work, 2013: commentary by Gill Hedley

Ann Sutton was born in North Staffordshire, went to Cardiff College of Art, then led the West Sussex College of Art weave department. She has travelled, lectured and exhibited all over the world, and her work is in many public and private collections, including 24 pieces purchased by the V&A.

She is a Visiting Professor at the University of the Arts, London, and a Senior Fellow of the Royal College of Art. She was awarded the MBE for her distinguished service to textiles. She has guest-curated many national exhibitions, and has had what she calls "a few good ideas" including The International Exhibitions of Miniature Textiles, The Ann Sutton Foundation, The Arundel Gallery Trail and Sight Specific.

She has led several projects which involve commissioning applied arts for public buildings, including the award-winning Southampton City Art Gallery in 1992, Winchester Cathedral Plans for New Textiles, and The Point.

Ann Sutton is known, internationally, for her innovative work in woven textiles, and has written nine books on the subject. After a highly successful retrospective exhibition instigated by the Crafts Council in 2004, she donated much of her work to public collections, deciding to drop the past, step into the unknown and explore what was to her an entirely new medium, paint.

And so the current work evolved. First, Ann Sutton experimented freely, allowing paint to do what comes naturally – slip, slide, merge, stick and blend. She created monoprints; structures made from paint with no support; she painted on all kinds of textiles. She acknowledged the colours and forms that emerged, wasted nothing and moved on, released.

That new "apprenticeship" with an ancient medium enables her to go back renewed to that which she does best – challenge herself with new materials, colour and movement. Having taken weave to its consummation, she passed her sophisticated technical equipment on to new makers, hung up her crown and grabbed a handful of new material. She responded as she had in the 1960s when she discovered the new plastics, a new material with no history and a huge future and wide application to other worlds than art. She found monofilament nylon back in 1960s – a material developed in 1939 for fishing lines – and today found a new source of extruded plastic filament that comes in the range of colours and finishes that she needs. But first they have been tested in a series of monochrome works with a focus simply on their potential kinesis. The viewer moves past and the work leaps into momentary action or, always striving for meaning or a message, the viewer may catch a glimpse of a letter shape. Calligraphy is the beauty of the written word and here we are given just enough encouragement to seek out words and meaning ourselves – Ann Sutton's work seduces and whispers then changes as we watch and move by.

Currently, these works are the perfect size for a gallery or domestic setting. The materials, durability and kinetic potential are beginning to demand a much bigger platform. What is awaited is a large wall, particularly a staircase, where the filaments dance, suggest then hide again their coded lettering or reveal whatever pattern our imagination creates.

New Work

