

selvedge

ISSUE 20 NOV/DEC 07

UK £7.50 EUROPE €15
USA \$20 CANADA \$20
AUS \$25 JAPAN ¥3840
REST OF WORLD £15

Scandinavia!

Shining a light on
Nordic textile traditions

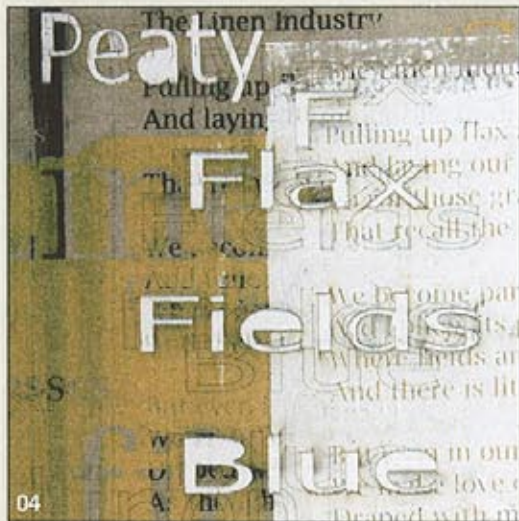
Pia Wallen
Marimekko
Karin Larsson



PLEASE DISPLAY UNTIL 31 DECEMBER 2007



THE FABRIC OF YOUR LIFE: TEXTILES IN FASHION, FINE ART, INTERIORS, TRAVEL AND SHOPPING



Making Changes: Contemporary Craft in Northern Ireland

3-30 August 2007 Ormeau Baths Gallery, Belfast
6 September-13 October 2007, Craft Northern Ireland

The history of Northern Ireland is inextricably entwined with the history of linen. That fabric is beautiful, versatile, strong and has known a multitude of uses on both sides of the border, but its heritage belongs to the North. The linen industry had its roots in the 17th century but peaked in the 19th century when, at the height of the industrial revolution, the work produced by designers trained at the Belfast School of Art and Design brought Belfast linen into high esteem. But, while an exhibition that celebrates that heritage would be useful and appropriate, Re-inventing Linen looks to the future rather than the past.

'The exhibition is the result of an experimental project,' commented Joseph McBrinn of the School of Art and Design, University of Ulster. 'It's a meeting of textile artists and industry. People see linen as heritage, but this project is looking at how it has potential to be part of the rebuilding of the North.'

The project that gave rise to the exhibition was organised by INTERFACE Centre for Research in Art, Technologies and Design at the University of Ulster, Belfast. Designer-makers specialising in textiles were invited to work with leading professionals from disciplines that spanned embroidery, weaving, textile colouration, and wearable technology, but which also included commercial buyers and conservators. It is the type of cross-disciplinary collaboration that is much vaunted but rarely realised.

'The project looked to industry rather than traditional handcraft as a starting point,' McBrinn explained. 'Instead of asking people to work at handlooms, they're being asked

questions. Can it be made? Who can make it? Can it link in with an existing industry? We're moving forward, but trying to reconnect with what we already do well – designing and making linen.'

The wall pieces which form the main part of the exhibition are group works - not linked to any particular artist. Taking the poem *The Linen Industry* by Michael Longley as a starting point. 'The poem presents a romantic view of a traditional industry, in a sense it's a love poem to industry, and interesting in that it was written in the 1970s, which was a difficult time and the end of the reign of the linen industry,' said McBrinn. One of the most beautiful pieces, *Pulling up Flax*, showed a subtle layering of text and fabric, retaining much of the meaning of the poem but also celebrating the familiar interplay of linen and light. Samson and Goliath used colour to emphasise the iconic image of the Harland and Wolff cranes of the Belfast shipyard. Other pieces included laser-cut appliqué, stitched linen, and paper fragments with preserved flax seed heads.

Samples of work by the individual artists are also shown, not in a way that draws attention to the maker, but that emphasises the versatility of the medium. Jackie Andrews has pigment-printed heavy linen with laser-cut floral semi-relief developed from traditional patterns of linen blooms; Jill Phillips has taken reclaimed vintage embroidered household linens, and combined these with felting, laser cut appliqué and embroidery.

This is an exhibition that deserves time and attention. Above all it is an optimistic show, one that carries the spirit of nostalgia, but also of regeneration and hope at a grounded, industrial level. ●●● Eleanor Flegg

04 *The Linen Industry*, printed, cut and bonded on linen, collaborative work by Interface

05 Digital print on leather, collaborative work by Interface