

**Visit to artist Diana Taylor's studio, London
October 2021**

Diana discusses her artistic process and techniques, including the use of Lefkaritika in her work with Marina Castledine, who is researching Cypriot lace and women's voice @mocasmarina

MC

The work I saw in Cyprus uses 3D scanning. Could you explain what that is?

DT

Basically, it's as if you're going to 3D print an object but what I'm doing with that technology instead is scanning the object. So, for that reason, I kind of mound the fabrics up. Otherwise, they would just be flat. The data that's collected is partly the texture reading and also the wire mesh reading. So the wire mesh looks like the kind of networks that appear in the work. They sort of read the folds.

MC

So, it's literally a scan of a 3D object.

DT

Yes, but I'm asking the programme to do something that it's not expecting, which is to turn it into a 2D print, I'm subverting the technology and then sort of confusing it, so it comes up with these weird mosaic like pockets.

MC

Almost hidden parts.

DT

Yes. And I like the idea of something hidden, almost like a metaphor for women's work. Like the authors of the Lefkara lace, that they are not necessarily known, you don't attribute it to one particular person. I don't think, correct me if I'm wrong.

MC

Well, I think it's a bit unclear. I think other pluemistras, those that still exist, they can often identify who's work it is. But beyond that, it's not always identified. I haven't seen a piece that's got say a title and a name, like you would do for an artist. So the lacemaker doesn't have a profile in that sense. Their voices are hidden within the community.

DT

Absolutely.

Here, I've slightly played around with the colours on Photoshop.

MC

Okay, so you take the scan into Photoshop then work on it further.

DT

Only the colours, I haven't done anything else to the image. That's just how the image was read. That's the data that I got directly from putting it into the programme and then saying, give it to me as to 2D print.

MC

And are they your family's cloth? Or is it material that you've collected?

DT

No, that was my mom's. And there were some other pieces.

MC

I love the fact that it's going back onto linen. It's not until you see it hanging like that, well, I hadn't picked up on it. It's very different than seeing it presented in the gallery space.

DT

Yes, exactly, that's really important for me, that it goes back onto the material. And here is another work.

MC

Wow. Yes. Okay.

DT

So this is a combination of the texture reading and the photographic detail. And then in other areas, it's just trying to understand, it sort of fills in with other with the colours that are around.

MC

This is incredible. So that must be when it's more bunched up, presumably?

DT

In some ways, I have no idea.

MC

That ambiguity is part of it?

DT

Yes. And then I've screen printed the wire mesh on top, and then other parts - I'm not sure about these, I may end up taking them off. But anyway, they're bits following the same shapes. So screenprints onto other fabrics, the wire mesh reading, and then bits stitched back in. They are kind of unfinished.

MC

Where's the wire mesh from?

DT

That's the same. If you're going to send something to 3D print, it needs to have the texture information, but you can separate them in the programme and look at them like bits of data. You can also look at it like a sort of solid. It's still got the same structure, but it's solid.

MC

So you're using all the process as part of the product?

DT

Yes. It's kind of looking at the past through the present, so looking at old traditional materials through new media. That was the point of wanting to use 3D scanning. That's something that I want to keep working with, but the wire mesh is sort of repeating throughout the work, these kinds of networks. I've printed on top of fabrics, and it's got messy - these two become very messy, so I maybe cover areas that are not happy - but I want to disrupt as well. I want to challenge.

MC

I can see that.

I found a book called 'The Dictionary of Lace' in a charity shop, one of those serendipitous finds and on the opening page, I haven't researched this any further, but it says that lace used to mean network. The original meaning of lace is network.

DT

That's amazing. That's sent shivers down my spine.

MC

It did for me too, but as I say, I haven't researched it further. I was in the Malvern hills, for a party, it was a totally obscure weekend, and we went for a walk to see the standing stones. And there was a secondhand bookshop, so I decided to go in and right there was the 'Dictionary of Lace' and I was like, you're joking.

DT

Oh my god. I love it when that happens.

MC

Well, for me, my whole project feels governed by that. Just as Hermione put us in contact. I haven't managed to speak to her yet, but I don't think she knew the lace connection, just that I was in Cyprus. It was my last night and your preview happened to be on.

DT

When you look at crochet work, that's what it's doing, isn't it, especially with the cut thread. Its just connected by these thin threads.

MC

Well, I'm interested in the holes and like you, deconstructing to reconstruct, but as far as I'm aware it's the only type of lace where holes are deliberately made. Rather than constructed, so through weaving or embroidery where they appear through the making, with Lefkaritika it's actually cut out.

DT

Is it similar to English broidery? Where they cut the holes and then sew around them?

MC

They must be connected. It's interesting because linen was really costly. Costly in terms of time, the flax to make it, which no longer grows in Cyprus, so then importing it. So, to be cutting bits out?

DT

It's a huge risk.

MC

Did your mum or your grandmother make it?

DT

No. She did crochet, and all of her sisters did crochet and embroidery. Mum did this - so there's lots of tapestry and cross stitch as well. This is 3D scanned. There's the whole image and then this is what the programme does with it, it fragments it.

Here is pulled thread work.

MC

It looks like they pull threads out, but they don't cut it with scissors. With Lefkaritika, they count the individual threads, pull and then cut. Scissors are used. So, if I'm looking at the parallels between that and trauma then the cut work specifically is really significant.

DT

That's really interesting.

MC

Did you train in textiles?

DT

No, painting. The first time I started using textiles in actual work, was in 2015. I did this short residency at Modern Art Oxford and made these hangings. The exhibition on at the time was William Morris and Andy Warhol, curated by Jeremy Deller. I was invited, along with other people who were using traditional craft processes, to go. Somebody was doing dry stone walling, somebody else riso print and I thought, what do I do? And at the time, I was using all these fabrics, so I thought I'd make them there. I've since dyed them. But all the fabrics I've collected, I brought them together.

MC

It's amazing how much difference that colour makes to the to the whole thing.

DT

They felt a bit too twee being the original colours and not disrupted in some way. And that's when I first worked with them, stitched with them.

MC

Are all the William Morris pieces off cuts? Do you know where they come from?

DT

They gallery gave me five sample books, from Morris and Co. I ripped all the sample pages out, took the wallpaper from some of them. Then I started collaging as well.

MC

It's been years since I've seen these, like C&H Fabric used to have. They used to hang them up.

DT

I've been using them, taking things out, collaging into them. And the hand keeps coming back. And nature of course, and other networks or networking looking things, technologies. This is where the fabrics were, so this is the ghost of the fabric. Which is really nice, because the dye has transferred.

MC

This is like something else, isn't it?

DT

I'm not quite sure how to use them.

MC

I love that. There's something really poetic about them.

DT

I don't know whether to leave them in the book, or these could be cut out and become a new piece themselves. Because I'm very much talking about the absence of things in the thesis. So when this happens, its quite distinct.

MC

And you've got fuzzy felt! You must talk to me about fuzzy felt, I'm a huge fan.

DT

I used to make paintings with fuzzy felt!

MC

These are rare. I had the fairy tales one! Oh my goodness. There's something about the tactility of it, though. At one time I was going to do a whole interactive wall in a gallery with fuzzy felt.

DT

I might leave these in the book. I think they look really beautiful. To be taken out and framed.

MC

The titles are quite interesting actually.

So do you call yourself a painter now?

DT

I call myself an artist. I used to call myself a painter, but now so much other stuff goes into the pieces including textiles, I'm working between them all the time.

MC

Do you think you'll stay? With the layering and the deconstruction? Can you see it going into another phase? Or do you want to stay here for longer?

DT

I think I want to push them. I think I see them going into a different phase. Already these two new pieces, I've pushed them on in a way since Cyprus, because I've reprinted on top. And it's become extremely busy. But the idea is to kind of then push that back again, you know. So it's very much the process, deconstructing and then reconstructing, building up and breaking down the image. And sort of having the absence and presence there. But what I'd like to do next is to make film. For this show in March, I really want to have film, so the archives all come together. And like a collage in film, you know, the process would be the same, very layered or fast moving.

MC

Like an animation almost?

DT

I want it to be very basic in terms of technology, I don't want anything flash, even where I'm using 3D scanning, I'm doing it in a very basic, very low resolution way. I'm not looking for accuracy. I want the parts where the holes are, where the pockets of misinformation are because I haven't done it properly.

MC

You can become lost in technology and then it's not about process, it's about technique, which is different and it can take over, you lose control.

DT

And I feel almost always out of control with technology. I mean, maybe it's a generational thing. You know, it's like, too fuzzy. So, I guess it's sort of embracing that. But also, it's very much about wanting to encapsulate the trace of the hand. And that's what I'm really interested in. In terms of looking at the

aura, like Walter Benjamin's aura, thinking about how the trace of the hand brings the artwork authenticity. So, then I'm trying to do that for the digital process too, to have that trace of human interaction and error. And I equate those two things.

MC

And why is that important to you?

DT

I think it's just that I want to see myself in a piece of work. Also, because we're losing it, because we're losing the materiality, so it's like holding on. Saying, don't let that go, that that we are able to use our hands, you know, we don't have to do everything with robots. So it's very similar in some ways, to the idea of wanting to hold on to something that's in decline. That we're about to lose. It's a feeling of not wanting to lose that.

MC

So there are some absences that are a presence, that we don't want to lose, which would be a loss.

Can you tell me a bit about the lace makers you met?

DT

I'll send you a video. I filmed a guy who owned a shop in Lefkara, who was talking about the fact they're now making them in factories, and they're machine made. And no one really wants them anymore anyway, they're very old fashioned. He was showing me piles of fabrics that he couldn't sell. And I did speak to a woman but she didn't really speak. And then I walked around with my dad and there were some women in the street making it, so I filmed their hands. They were pretty much silent. But my lack of Greek could be part of that. I am having lessons.

MC

Me too, but they were silent. Which is the subject of my PhD. How silence is a language and about embodied listening, and if we can recognise silence as a language through embodied listening, then what does that mean for our particularly Western focus on voice as power.

DT

Amazing, that sounds fascinating.

MC

Often silence is seen as an absence. But which cultures can we learn from to recognise silence as presence? Just like the holes in Lefkaritika, the holes are essential to the design, they are not a mistake or a gap. They're part of the part of the story.

And I found, like you and others have found, that the lacemakers are often very silent. And give bits of information, often repeat set phrases, just like lines in the story, to those that are interested. But I get the impression that at the heart of the story, there are silences. And the tourist industry, so for example the visual images that you see, contain silences, as do the archives. The story of the men who traded the lace abroad, there's a very strong narrative around that. Unlike the women's stories, the social history of lace from their perspective. So, there's kind of silence upon silence that's both elected and unelected. Women are written out of history again. That's my starting point for the research. I may find it's not like that. But the only text I've found talks about the artistic history, not the women.

DT

I guess they would have sat there and told stories to each other.

MC

Did you see the panels that were around the village? They say, 'women sat chatting in groups making lace'. Like it was all a wonderful thing. I'm thinking, they often lost their sight, got really bad arthritis. You know, it was really painful, really hard. I'm not saying it was not wonderful too, but it was tough work. For hours and hours for very little return. The men who traded it took the biggest cut. So I'm not sure how much chatting was actually going on.

I think there's a bit of a myth that's been built up. When the children were in bed, the women just sat around chatting making lace. I've heard about them working long into the night to finish. To finish pieces that would then be taken to London.

DT

It's funny because I think, if I had asked anything, it would just be about the design.

MC

My lack of knowledge about textiles means I'm interested in it, but only really as a metaphor. I'm more interested in their story. Their life stories. And often that's met with a with a silence that appears to cover pain as well. So lots of arranged marriages, as we would define them, at the age of 13, or 14. Not using those words but that would be my feminist interpretation. Or maybe that's just fact. I don't know, but there's definitely domestic violence too, accompanied by, that's just the way it was. It's just the way it was. So the silence goes on.

DT

This is so interesting.

MC

I'm trying to be fair to women some of whom I've only just met, and some that I'll never meet, only through their work. But those that I have spoken to, that's the case.

DT

Yes. So interesting. Now, I've just made a connection and I don't know if it's a Cypriot thing, but my mum would always brush things under the carpet. A lot of this work is about that, you know, the idea of disrupting the façade of something. Even now, there's a lot of covering up. I don't know if it's a cultural thing, but it's like, everything's fine.

MC

If it's brushed under the carpet, you don't lift it up.

DT

So much secrecy.

MC

There were other levels of awareness.

DT

Through touch you understand. And some gaps, some losses, can't be filled.

MC

Yet the dominant narrative asks us to fill them. Fill the gaps, fill the silences and everything will go back to normal again, rather than perhaps allowing them to be, listening and learning from them. Being ok with loss.