

Fiona Jardine

I'll just maybe quickly introduce myself, I'm Fiona Jardine, I currently work in the department of Design History and Theory at Glasgow School of Art where I'm aligned with fashion and textile students primarily. Prior to that I taught Critical and Contextual studies in the School of Textile and Design at Heriot-Watt University in Galashiels and even prior to that I taught Mixed Media Textiles at Duncan of Jordanstone so I've been around the houses in some way.

The focus of my talk today is going to be on this artefact, hopefully I'll just scroll my slide on. This artefact which I was commissioned to design as part of a film project developed and produced by Collective Gallery in Edinburgh with the film maker Peter Bauer between 2016-2018 and the film called Workers! focused on the struggle of Scot Pep Sex Workers Collective to have their labour rights recognised in Scotland so the film was co-developed with Scot Pep Collective and Petra the film maker and really the banner, took, I suppose played an important role in the film as a character, so one of the pivotal scenes in the film is the unfurling of the banner at the STUCHQ in Glasgow, so to some extent it was designed as a character, a prop and a kind of scene within the film and I think as a character in the film in had been imagined that it would take a certain form that it would speak to certain aesthetic traditions that posit handcraft and textile cultures as feminist collectivist methods of production and then that that kind of sonography would be obvious in the artefact and in the artefacts materials and manufacture.

However, at the same time the banner was also a live commission in the sense that one of the aims of the Commission was to produce a working artefact in other words a trade union banner that Scot Pep could take possession of independent of the film and I guess the design of the banner came along quite late in the process of developing the film so it was really 2018 towards the end of the extensive research that Collective Scot Pep and Petra Bauer undertook as this banner came along and I was interviewed for the commission by all parties involved in research and developing the film and I guess that even in that interview process which involved me presenting samples of work that I'd done previously there was a deliberate choice to maybe work outside some of those craft and textile traditions that we've heard other speakers talking about this afternoon.

So I did work through the commission with the Scot pep group and my first workshop with the group after the interview was focused around discussion of a series of photographs I took as part of a recent research trip I made to the People's History Museum in Manchester and I'm going to share with you some images of examples that were important to the group as they thought about what they wanted from the commission and how they wanted me to approach the design of their banner. So this is an image of a banner produced by the firm of George Tutill a 19th Century banner making firm which I suppose evolved out of the traditions of sign writing and fairground decoration. George Tutill in the 19th century was responsible for the design and production of I think about ¾ of all of this kind of 19th century trade union banners and you know it's essentially an oil painting on fabric and I guess that this design particularly appealed to the group I was working with because it was so obviously a part of an established tradition and they were very attracted to that idea, they were attracted to the idea it was painted on cloth and in discussions I had with them they were very adamant that they wanted the banner to be produced as something they couldn't make themselves so the group didn't want to hand craft the banner or embroider it or actually undertake that kind of textile tradition and it's something that maybe goes back to what Lindy was saying in her presentation that the crafting of a textile banner to applique and embroider etc. takes a long time and I suppose a level of confidence with the materials and techniques, also, I'm not an artist or a designer that really works with textiles traditions or textile methods in my work, I am primarily a graphic artist in the sense that I use drawing, and paper collage, photography, digital imaging in my work and so this goes back to the I suppose the commissioning process and the fact that the group wanted to work with me based on the portfolio that I showed them.

This banner also provoked an interesting discussion around imagery, so you can see on the right hand side the named figure of William Caxton who introduced the printing press to England and on the left

hand side you can see the allegorical figures of Knowledge and the Messenger who are represented as female figures, so this allegorical use of the female figure contrasts with the named figure of William Caxton and goes back to something that Fran might have mentioned in her presentation earlier today that female figures are fine in their allegorical capacity but they're not named in the way that William Caxton is so there's a politic there but it opened out onto discussions about I suppose the kind of assumptions that figurative representations can raise and the exclusions that can accompany figurative representations too. So discussions around this banner involved the kind of representation figures we might want to use in the Scot Pep banner, the kind of tools we might want to represent, the kind of situation we might want to represent and following those discussions I guess there was more of a kind of decision to follow a typographic design that was less exclusionary because it's not representing particular practices and particular people so the decision not to make the banner figurative was considered and driven by the kind of discussions we had around these figurative forms.

At the same time, the group were very keen to be represented by this traditional form of Trade Union banner to inhabit that form and it's actually instantly recognisable patriarchal established tradition that the group were keen to work with or keen that I should work with. The group were very attracted to the idea that their banner could be hand painted, so part of the initial discussions were around painting a traditional banner like this using oil paint on fabric. But as discussions progressed I suppose maybe other elements and practicalities raised themselves as conditions that prevented the banner being hand painted at the end of the day.

I suppose another aspect that the group really liked about that banner that I just showed you, the typographical banner, was the double sided face of it and in the People's History Museum in Manchester there were a series of banners that represent this double sided form, in particular, this ASLEF banner and the double sided form is really the public facing form on one side and a form that faces back to the group so I guess you know banners really establish an affinity for a group of individuals and the group I was working with was really attracted to the idea of a public facing side and a private facing side too so to go back to that idea of the kind of practicalities for producing a hand painted banner if you've having a double sided banner then you're kind of doubling the work associated with producing a painted image so on a practical level it became difficult to do that.

We also looked at some earlier banners, now these are banners that have been embroidered, on the right-hand side is the Norbury Women's Cooperative Guild is a banner that has been embroidered and on the right hand [sic] side is the Redhill Womens 'Cooperative Guild banner, a banner that has been painted but the group were attracted to the simplicity of the design in both of these cases. The wheat sheaf is a symbol that has been associated with the co-operative movement in general but it makes a really sort of dramatic graphic impact that the group were interested in that simplicity that kind of simple purpose.

This is a detail from the Norbury Women's Cooperative banner produced in 1923 and not only were the group attracted again to the simplicity of the imagery within this banner, they really loved the fabric that the imagery had been painted onto. And I guess this again it reminds me of a quote from Fran's presentation earlier which I did note down, this quote from Eileen Wheeler that silk and velvet are materials associated with the drawing room and definitely there's a politic to the fabrics that's embodied in the weave, in the construction of the fabric and the associations you make with certain types of fabric, so at that level, although working with Scot Pep there was a decision to inhabit that patriarchal tradition of Trade Union banner painting, there was also a desire to subvert it through the material manifestation of the banner if you like, so there was a deliberate decision to use fabrics that were not necessarily associated explicitly with that painted banner tradition and again it's something that going back to the research I did at the People's History Museum in Manchester that you can see manifesting across a range of banners so this banner was an important precedent for the Scot Pep banner that we eventually produced (North West never going underground) so yeah there was a deliberate choice around the fabric that we ended up using.

I've included this slide as a slide from the second workshop that I undertook with the group in which we were working on I suppose the kind of formal elements around typography, how we might use typography in a representative fashion, what kind of fabrics were possible, for use in realising the banner so I think that it was a really kind of open and enjoyable process so we had lots of discussions around the history of banners but also around the way that I guess sex work could be represented in a way that wasn't relying on figurative symbols and part of that was the choice of typography and part of it was the choice of fabric that we ended up using.

As part of the process there was a lot of back and forth in the design process between me and the group, I drew up designs in pencil including half size banner design so large scale working drawing in pencil on graph paper so I could make amendments really quickly using pencils, a very quick way to make amendments before we produced a digital file that was taken to the Centre for Advanced Textiles at Glasgow School of Art, and used to print the banners digitally. So in the end we didn't hand paint the banners at all, the files were produced digitally, that allowed for the banner to be replicated, one edition of the banner entered the Centre for Research Collections and one edition entered the possession of Scot Pep. Digital printing allowed for that to be accomplished, it allowed for the banner to be produced as a double sided in a satin fabric and it allowed for that fabric to be weighted in a way that allowed for the group to carry it comfortably, so actually the weight of the banner was an important consideration as part of the design process.

The fabric is a demanding fabric to work with, again I'm not a textile expert in that sense, I'm not a textile maker, so the banner was stitched up by one of my colleagues at Glasgow School of Art, Ashley Miller, and I should also mention that Maeve Redmond graphic designer produced the digital files so when we're thinking about work and thinking about the types of work that go into creating this banner even though it's not a hand crafted banner there are lots of I guess lots of contributions on that professional front too and it's easy to overlook the contribution of a graphic designer in preparing the files and it's easy to overlook the contribution of the fashion technician as it was in making up the banner too.

So in the end the banner for me, when I reflect on the design process, did explicitly challenge its own characterisation as an item that had been made according to collectivists feminist textile tropes so I think in the formulation of the film there was this idea that it would be something that was applied or embroidered or handcrafted but actually as a real life commission they wanted their banner to be realised in a different way, they wanted it to be realised as something that they couldn't necessarily produce themselves and they wanted it to be professionally realised and ultimately that determined the form of the banner that you see today.

I'm probably going to end there, I'm happy to take questions at the end.