

MUSINGS AT THE MUSEUM

Hayley Mills-Styles reflects on her childhood visits to Whitby Museum and reveals how she explores how they inspired her work today

words | HAYLEY MILLS-STYLES

For as long as I can remember, I have been fascinated by museums and galleries. As a child, I explored houses and gardens at National Trust properties, and discovered the coastal town of Whitby with my grandparents.

Whitby Museum is a treasure chest of curious objects where you can learn about everything from geology to historical costume. Founded in 1823 by the Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society, the museum is run by a dedicated team of trustees and volunteers. In 1931, the Museum moved to its current home in Pannett Park.

I approached the museum in 2016 and since October last year have been working as their Artist in Residence, researching the collections to create a series of works. 'Archive and Other Stories' will be exhibited in September, and shares stories about my life through objects from the Museum's collection.

I use fabric and thread to tell stories and when I approached Whitby Museum, my goal in working with them was to interpret their collections in a different way, by telling stories from my life using pieces from the collections as a reference point. The narwhal was a natural place to start for me. I was fascinated with this beautiful creature when I was a child, and on my first research visit I spent a long time sitting at a nearby bench making notes.

The skeleton hangs in the natural history wing of the museum, where the aged bones cast beautiful shadows on the walls. As well as the shapes, their patina and texture are fascinating and lend themselves to a variety of textile techniques. My notebooks are full of images and ideas that I want to explore when I'm in the studio, from embroidery to felt making, and dyeing to patchwork.

As a starting point, I've been exploring imagery using my photographs and

drawings of the skeleton, creating designs of the backbone and rib cage which I stitch onto heavy wool fabric. The wool has a beautiful texture and the dense machine embroidery blends into the fabric's surface.

I explore ideas through making, developing new pieces by sampling and seeing what elements are successful. I'm lucky enough to work in a studio at home overlooking the garden which I fill with research images, fabric, and thread samples. I gather these together to create mood boards, and my samples are kept in notebooks where I can write little notes to myself about new ideas.

I've been working with digital embroidery since completing my MA in Textiles at Manchester School of Art. I use a Pfaff Creative 3.0 and 6D Software which allow me to create designs directly from my photographs and drawings. The software also helps to guide me when selecting a colour palette, to ensure the work reflects my inspiration.

I love to work with natural fabrics like wool and calico, combining them with techniques like rust dyeing. I first started rust dyeing a few years ago, inspired by beachcombing trips to Whitby and Runswick Bay. I spent hours collecting fragments of metal from the beach, and the beautiful colours inspired an ongoing project called Time and Tide. As any lover of textiles and craft will know, it's hard to focus on just one project!

The common theme that runs throughout all my work is memory; creating stories about my own experiences that resonate with other people. Textiles and embroidery offer me a unique opportunity to present these stories in a way that draws in the viewer. As I continue my work with the museum, I hope to capture the wonder of my childhood visits to this wonderful place. **DC**

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Clockwise from top: Narwhal Textures Embroidery; Project Sketchbook; Project Moodboard; Narwhal Skeleton Embroidery; Rust Dyed Pin Cushion.

Photography by Mat Dale

