NANCY TINGEY - ORIGINAL MATERIAL

INTRODUCTION by JANET DE BOER - I've spent the last thirty years condensing material for a printed magazine format. Here I can be expansive - and there are so many extraordinary makers out there who deserve a bit of extra space.

I had read of Nancy Tingey’s recent award for her Painting with Parkinsons initiatives and contacted her to see about including a short notice in this E-Bulletin. Being aware of Nancy’s artistic career (and having included her numerous times in Textile Fibre Forum magazine) I decided to get expansive - and see if she would like to be my Inaugural Original Material E-Subject. She agreed.

Rather than neatly condense and organize Nancy, I decided to include quite a lot about her, interspersed with images - the images are not necessarily in chronological order; they sometimes appear at my own whim, to liven the text...

Where I have inserted some text, Nancy Tingey's words appear in quotes. In other places no quote marks are used and you can assume it's all text from Nancy. I have used bold text freely to draw the eye to the story's progress. Photo credits: unless a photographer is mentioned, Nancy Tingey gets the photo credit.

I hope you take some time to get to know Nancy Tingey better - it has been a joy to prepare this article.

Remember that this bulletin, and Nancy’s story will also be available as a PDF file from the TAFTA website: www.tafta.org.au

A UK Beginning: Bury, Lancashire. I was brought up right in the middle of textile country, surrounded by paper and cotton mills. I could count 14 tall factory chimneys from my bedroom window and hear the whirr of machinery on my way to school. An uncle owned Bury Felt (Hardman’s Mills), where, much later, English textile artist Anne Sutton experimented on the industrial feltmaking machines.

Nancy Tingey at work on a ‘Nets’ project. Below she tells her story.....
My mother’s father had managed a cotton mill, importing the raw cotton material from America via Liverpool and exporting cloth to Africa. My maternal grandmother must have known a thing or two about textiles as well. My mother and her two sisters used to make all their own clothes, using exquisite silks for their wedding and bridesmaid’s dresses. So from an early age I sewed, scouring interesting fabrics from fent shops and markets. I still have some of my early embroidery efforts, insisting on designing the patterns myself.

**From the UK to Australia:** At school the only thing I was really good at (swimming came close) was art. I remember on one occasion not being top of the class for that and being mortified. I collected all the school art prizes and I dreamed of going to the Slade and being another Dame Laura Knight. Instead I studied Fine Art at the University of Durham, specialising in stained glass and painting.

Then I worked as an art curator and lecturer, managing to win a travelling scholarship as ‘the most promising’ stained glass contestant but not making much else, apart from my own clothes and home furnishings. Being a fan of the Arts and Crafts movement I used to lecture on William Morris and collect fabric seconds from the Lancaster factory which dyed Morris reprints for Sandersons.

In the late 1960s I held a few exhibitions of paintings and glass in the north of England, then, in 1971, I married my old uni friend Bob Tingey and moved to Australia where he was working as a geologist.
I carried on painting and working in glass until the children came along. A friend made a hexagon quilt for the eldest son, and in 1978, while we were all living in Cambridge on study leave; she showed me how to do hand-piecing. I was hooked. So much so that when, the following year, we traipsed off as a family with Bob on another jaunt, this time to the West Australian outback for 3 months, I took fabrics and sewing materials rather than canvases.

At right, ‘Tingey Triads’ (1980). One-inch-side hexagons, hand stitched English piecing, wool/cotton blend, 210 x 210cm. ‘My first quilt. Given to my mother-in-law when my husband turned 40. Then I realised I’d better make one for my mother when I turned 40! and so it went on…. for 30 years. Exhibited in my solo “Last and Lost Quilt Show” at Strathnairn Homestead Gallery, ACT, in 2010. Photo by Trevor Greenwood, Bolton UK. Apart from one piece all the fabrics came from family members.” (Now in the collection of the artist). The 'Lost Quilt' is described below.

Piecing Frenzy: I could add bits of fabric while camping, travelling, at school meetings, on the beach – wherever. This piecing frenzy continued until Bob was diagnosed with Parkinson’s in 1987.....

Below you can see Greenmantle and The Piece Process - Red Mantle made during this quilt-obsessed time.
Each is 68 x 68cm; wool/cotton blend with paper, hand stitched. About Red Mantle: "In 1993 I was part of a communal project organised by Jenny Stephens to make The Mantle artwork for the National Council of Churches inaugural meeting in Canberra. This was my own version.... The work is now in a private collection in Perth. In 2005 I made a green version which was hung in the Last and Lost Quilt show where it was purchased by Annette Gero for her Australian Quilt Collection... For years I grappled with the idea of how to represent the exciting patterns which occur when making a piece with stitch on just one side so the quilts became open (netlike, I suppose). Then I realized that if I kept the papers in and allowed the ends of threads to show, making the process more apparent, the partially connected patches would form the fringe. Like the non-border I was looking for...."

THE LOST QUILT: Hanging from the Castle Wall The inspiration for this hanging, seen below, came while contemplating the growth of ivy on the walls of Appleby Castle, North of England, in 1982... The work was purchased by the Police Academy for its new Computer Centre in Canberra in 1984. The architect had seen the work at the High Court where Canberra Quilters had put on a show to complement Fibre Interchange, the 1984 FORUM held in Canberra.

The work disappeared when the Computer Centre moved. I was amused by the thought that the police had stolen it! Repeated attempts to locate it drew a blank, and in desperation, in 2010, I drew attention to it by putting MISSING notices in my solo exhibition Last and Lost Quilt at Strathnairn.

A friend who was embarrassed that her son, who was high up in the police force hadn't managed to come up with an answer tried once more and in early 2011 the quilt was found hanging happily in a corridor, still in the same building. And none the worse for wear. It is now in the Police Museum on the same site. See below....
Life After Parkinson's. 1987 and Bob's diagnosis. "I lost my way, couldn't work on my own and needed a job where I would be told what to do. I was also aware I might have to become the fulltime breadwinner. Our children were aged 13, 11, and 9. I returned to work as an art curator.

"Then, in 1991, I went to Fay Bottrell's workshop at TAFTA's Mittagong FORUM and began thinking outside the box again, making threads and combining paint and textile media. Workshops with Karen Edin and Sue Dove followed, always about ideas and how to solve them in textile-related media".

Note: Fay Bottrell subsequently changed the spelling of her first name to Fahy. 'TAFTA' stands for The Australian Forum for Textile Arts' and the 'Mittagong FORUM' was held at Frensham School, Mittagong for 14 years, to 2004. Nancy Tingey was there from the beginning.

The story continues.....
Living in Two Cultures. For some years I had been toying with the idea of using my art work to explore the issues arising from living in two cultures. At this stage I had spent half my life in England and half in Australia. My MA project was titled Two Ply.

At Jeanette Appleton’s suggestion I began experimenting with the industrial feltmaking machines she was using at Huddersfield University. Her work was with Merino wool. I was combining Merino, representing Australia, with Herdwick wool from the hill sheep of the Lake District. Looking back, this opportunity turned out to be unique. No-one before me had used Herdwick wool on these machines and since then the machines have been de-commissioned.
Early pieces for MA research incorporated the hand-felting together of layers of Merino (Australia) and Herdwick (England) wool. "Pre-felts of each were stitched, then felted together, with the threads becoming distorted and fixed in the process. The tactile nature of this treatment appealed to the subjective side of my story - the emotional response. And I was intrigued by the symbolism inherent in working with migrating fibres....

The Dilo feltmaking machine deconstructed the 'tops' by carding them - breaking down the old lifestyle to build the new - then piled up diaphanous layers to create a firm yet filmy textile, so light and transparent that the intermingled threads could be clearly identified, though dislocated and relocated at the mercy of the machine.

The challenge was to see how insubstantial I could make the fabric without it losing its character, or disintegrating."

The story continues...
"I produced continuous lengths of needle-felted cloth beginning with Herdwick (image at left) to represent my upbringing in the north of England, connecting with Merino (life near Canberra), then moving on to more Herdwick.

"The interplay between the flow and dance of fibre manipulation and the relentless motion of the needlefelt machine mirrored the sensation I experienced while flying between countries...

"My travel routes were created by embedding handspun lengths of Merino and Herdwick wools into the cloth on an Automax machine. Threads laid down the middle of the cloth as it was drawn into the machine took on lives of their own whilst dividing the fabric into two halves, representing duality.... Some fabrics trapped the threads in between two cloth layers felted together." (See image below)

*Two Threads* - Merino and Herdwick wool, handfelted. 40 x 35cm. Made 2003.

Two additional works from the *Two-Ply* body of work are shown below. During April 2007, CRAFT ACT hosted *Two-Ply* at their Canberra gallery. An article about the work, by Nancy Tingey, appeared in issue #87 of *Textile Fibre Forum* magazine (2007).

For that article, Tingey said, "Although my first degree was in Fine Art I chose to take my second in textiles.... It turned out to be a lucky choice as the symbolism of terms such as fibres of being, fabric of life and going with the flow matched my brief.... through textiles I could see things from two sides, and also embed fibres and ply threads as part of the creative process...."

The MA was "one of life’s great turning points for me, opening up my work in unexpected ways. I think the most important aspect was discussing issues in tutorials and group projects so that I gained confidence to explore ideas in new ways. I had been pushing boundaries with my pieced textile work but now I felt free to branch out with media and techniques completely new to me. My work became materials led."
Above, detail of 'Mapping Memories', wool stitched and hand felted; 30 x 25cm; made 2003

The Story continues....................
Above, 'Back to the Fold' installation, Craft ACT exhibition of 'Two-Ply' (2007), machine needle-felted Herdwick and Merino wool cloth, width 68cm. Two details appear below. Photo credit:Creative Image Photography
MORE ON PAINTING WITH PARKINSONS

BACKING UP TO 1994: From a Media Release: ‘Painting with Parkinsons’ is an innovative art program for people living with Parkinson’s. Pioneered in 1994 by Nancy Tingey, an artist whose husband has Parkinson’s, the program evolved as a result of her overseas studies on a 1996 Churchill Fellowship looking at ways of using art as a therapy for Parkinson’s.

Designed to provide a ‘can do’ activity for people whose abilities have been compromised by Parkinson’s, a typical class begins with informal chat and refreshments followed by a meditation or centring down time to calm the nervous system and focus the mind.

This is followed by exercises to kick start the body into action using prompts and triggers. Making the first mark, which leads to another, is in itself a major achievement for people who find writing difficult. And although communication through speech is often compromised with Parkinson’s, self expression flows through the use of high quality art materials which encourage confident experimentation. Magic happens.

Curiously, evidence suggests creative ability is enhanced by Parkinson’s disease. Certainly it seems that when the activity ‘kicks in’ there is no stopping the artist at work.

![Image](antarctic_waters.jpg)


As the session draws to a close with respectful discussion of the morning’s work it becomes clear that participants are enjoying increased social interaction as well as experiencing relief from stress and depression. Feelings of self-worth are enhanced through creative art activity and distressing Parkinson’s symptoms, such as tremor, may be alleviated.

A frozen moment becomes a turning point using wet paint on wet paper. A tremoring hand is stilled as colours flow from the brush. Frustration and anger become a series of intense explosive shapes and lines. Cheryl Jobsz, facilitator.

The group is facilitated by a team of artists, therapists and volunteer helpers.

Nancy Tingey's CV, 'Art as a Therapy for Parkinson's' reveals just how involved and active she has been for the past 20 years - she retired from the position of Coordinator Painting with Parkinsons in 2014 and is working on a
book about these years, assisted by two grants. one from the ACT Churchill Fellows Association and one from Parkinson's ACT.

At right, *Nancy Tingey (standing) appears with Ann Nugent.* In 2014 Nancy Tingey received the ACT Chief Minister’s Inclusion Award for Long Service.

The photo was taken at Art Atelier, Canberra, for a banner the Churchill Trust is making for Floriade featuring a ‘select group’ of 6 Churchill Fellows for the 50th anniversary of the Trust.

Churchill died in 1965 and Australia got its Fellowship program off the ground pronto - and very successfully.

‘Painting with Parkinsons’ meets on Friday mornings in the Banks Building at the Australian National Botanic Gardens in Canberra.

For more information including artists stories and examples of art work visit
www.paintingwithparkinsons.org.au

NANCY TINGEY - Spinner of Webs

Above, 'Down Under Quilt' with detail: goose down, cotton thread, lead, white paint; 100 x 77 x 3cm; photo by Geoff Woolfenden
At right, preparing the goose down for 'Down Under Quilt', seen above. This work featured in the story, 'Nancy Tingey - Spinner of Webs' written by Kerry-Anne Cousins for issue #97 (2010), 'Textile Fibre Forum'. The article covers Tingey's 2008 exhibition, Interior-Exterior at Craft ACT; also her 2009 solo exhibition at Narek Galleries, Tanja, where Down Under Quilt was first shown. As well she held the exhibition Unravel at Craft ACT in 2009; two works from this series appear below.

The article by Kerry-Anne Cousins describes Tingey's experimenting with small prickly bidgee-widgee seed heads (Acaena Novae-Zelandiae) that "she has found can be joined together to make almost indestructible links.... Displaying such works presents a considerable challenge. The seed head 'mats' need to be suspended out from the wall so that the light can capture the beauty of their interlinking structures."

Nancy Tingey says: "I have been working with Bidgee-widgees for four years. I first came across them near Tumbarumba in January 2009 while working on an environmental structure during a master class led by Ruth Hadlow. This was going nowhere and I was about to give up when I noticed my socks were covered in burrs. Excited by this unlikely material I began a series of studies using the bits remaining when the seed heads disintegrated on the way back to my workroom. Then by assembling whole heads directly on site I made a small Bowl of Prickles...."
Above, detail of ‘Bidgee-Widgee Net’, 20 x 20cm. In recent times Tingey has created still more work with these prickly seed heads (See ‘Regeneration’ story which follows).

NETS AND NETWORKS............

“My absorption in the net-making process has been reflected in the development of Networks, the group I founded with like-minded colleagues in 2008 to interconnect with and encourage other artists using net-like images in their practices. Between 2010 and 2013, six exhibitions were held in Canberra, interstate and overseas by the core group of 20 members.

In 2011 four of us travelled to Finland for a Nets conference.”

Above, linen net by Nancy Tingey. Two details are shown below.
“Collaboration with Angie Wyman, who curated a Nets exhibition in the UK to coincide with our first show, led to her bringing work to combine with Australian work for exhibitions at The Geelong FORUM (Sinclaire Gallery, Geelong Grammar School) and at Strathnairn Gallery.”

Nets And Networks Cumbria UK and Nets and Networks Australia appeared in issue #101 (2011) of Textile Fibre Forum.
Nets at TAFTA’S Geelong FORUM 2012 appeared in issue #109.
Netting Strathnairn by Nancy Tingey appeared in issue #112.

Above, 'Through the Fence', Nancy Tingey's contribution to 'Netting Strathnairn', a project coordinated by Gabriella Hegyes in 2013 - see start of this article

Further to Nets and Networks - "Carlisle, Cumbria; Canberra, Australia and Turku, Finland - an unlikely trio at first glance..."
So commences the first of the 2 'Nets' articles in issue #101 (TFF). "Each university agreed to explore their own responses to 'Nets' with individual exhibitions at each location." They were connected 'virtually' so they could compare outcomes.

"The exhibitions explore new approaches to open source-based teaching. By nurturing a functioning network between different textile institutions, the diversity of artistic power, dynamics and optimism of textile practice can be celebrated." This information is quoted from the 'Networks' blog at www.netwurks.wordpress.com and/or www.networksaustralia.blogspot.com

**REGENERATION**

In 2013 Nancy Tingey was invited by the Canberra Museum and Art Gallery to submit an artwork for the Centenary exhibition *Odyssey* in response to a paper on Biodiversity by local ecologist David Shorthouse. She titled the work *Regeneration*. Here she tells her story.

"It was an art installation comprising of a line of a hundred native plant seed heads symbolising the next century of Canberra’s development from 2013 to 2113. The exhibit also included a separate circle of seed heads representing the sense of community stimulating the city’s development."
"As each seed head represented one year, the assembled work represented each year’s development being dependent on the year before for its form, symbolising Canberra’s growth pattern over the next hundred years. Each year builds on the one before and in turn connects to the one ahead....

..."The fact that I was able to source the Bidgee-widgee within the ACT indicates there has at least been some success in ‘protecting the water catchment and immediate landscape setting for the city’. *Regeneration* also affirms the “high visibility of ‘nature’ in the city”....

...."Greening Australia contacts directed me to a member of Friends of Mount Majura and Park Ranger *Luke McElhinney*. Luke explained exactly where the plants were so *I made three prickle picking expeditions* - one of them with my Networks colleague and friend *Gabriella Hegyes* - to collect over 500 seed heads.... *Regeneration* was ephemeral. After the Canberra Odyssey exhibition it was returned to the land to regenerate."

**Footnote:** In March 2015 Nancy revisited the site with English artist Mitch Phillips. Fresh green *Acaena Novae Zealandiae* foliage had sprouted along the sown line; the seeds had regenerated.
Nancy Tingey says, "I have also been exploring ways of creating wrapped forms using shredded nets. The Bird Net Nests series led to the Net Ball series; in both cases an important aspect of the work was the way fibres combine without the use of glue or stitch, building on the interlocking feature of the bidgee-widgee work."

"If I could make bird net nests out of shredded bird netting maybe I could make fruits out of fruit net bags... I’d need lots. **So for two years members of Networks and other friends collected their used fruit bags for me.** By 2014, I had 3 sacks full. I thought about making an apple or two... But somehow the idea didn’t gel..... I started cutting strips of netting and made a small ball...."

"Then like most Eureka moments it came to me in the middle of the night...I’d make Ten(nis) Net Balls. If I shredded the net bags they could be wound like balls of wool, the spiky bits sticking in layers to one another if I got the tension right and tucked in loose ends."
“I loved the process of cutting and winding, and there was the challenge of getting the balls completely round and the exact size of tennis balls to keep me focussed. Also the last few layers had to be judged carefully to allow different colours to show through.”

Referring to the *Net Ball*, detail seen above: “The fun part of this work was adding the final layers in which I introduced the colour blue. As I only had a few bags of this colour it was as precious to me as lapis lazuli was to Renaissance painters. Seeing how the blue veil lifted the work made all the effort worthwhile. Magic happens.”

**MAGIC RE-VISITTED**

The expression, ‘Magic happens’ is a theme running through Nancy Tingey’s story. Here she describes her current direction and, finally, revisits the impact of TAFTA and the Textile FORUM conferences and the magic found there.

“I continue to run all projects from my Strathnairn studio where I have a number of projects on the go at any one time. In clarifying this movement across disciplines, curator Jacque Schultze comments, in the introduction to the *Netlines* catalogue, ‘Perhaps what Tingey brings most consistently to her work is a sense of wonder and curiosity about the materials she uses and the journeys they take her on, and an unerring sensitivity that is powerful in its elegance and simplicity’.”

Reminiscing about the value of the TAFTA’s Textile FORUM “in supporting me as an artist,” Nancy Tingey wrote the following essay which completes her story, for now, as *Original Material*. NOTE: As we were preparing this article, she was applying to continue as an Accredited Professional Member (APM) of Craft ACT, having been continuously accepted an an APM since 1996 (reviews take place every five years via a peer assessment panel). There can be no doubt she is already at work on new ideas and projects.
My first FORUM was with "Fibre Interchange" in 1984 (Canberra) where Liz Jeneid, the tutor for Self-Portraits gave us exercises in expressive mark making. I paired up with Carol Divall there, and through her I was offered an exhibition at Fibre Design, Goulburn, in 1994.

Nancy was asked to write about this workshop for 'Textile Fibre Forum' and her article appeared in Volume 3 (issue #3) for 1984 (which is also the first time her work appeared in the magazine, four of her hexagon quilts).

"Liz came to stay with me when I was living with my family in Hobart in early 1986 so she could do a design workshop. I was still working on hexagon-pieced quilts at the time in preparation for my one and only solo retrospective exhibition, Discipline and Freedom held at Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Kendal, UK, the following November. That was the year Mary Burkett retired as Director of Abbot Hall and travelled to Australia. I had been her art curator from 1967 to 1970."

Note: Mary Burkett died in November 2014 at the age of 90. An extensive obituary from 'The Guardian' can be found at www.theguardian.com/culture/2014/dec/05/mary-burkett

"I don't think I went to a TAFTA FORUM again until (Mittagong) 1991; 'life' had intervened. The trigger then was Fay Bottrell. She was a friend of a friend who had often talked about Fay (now Fahy) so I was curious. Also one of
my favourite books was The Artist Craftsman in Australia which Fay edited. We made threads out of shredded textiles. This resonated a few years later when I visited the Collection de L’Art Brut in Lausanne and saw a beautiful dress knitted from ravelled cotton sheeting made by a woman in a mental home.

It was at the Mittagong FORUM ‘95 that Joan James, Margo Jones, Lynne Johnson, Val Smith, Karen Nienaber and I formed The Explorers to encourage one another in our textile work. We met and exhibited together for 7 years. I took part in Liz Jeneid’s Tamworth 1995 Masterclass and got hooked on machine stitching on paper, beginning a series of works about the brain. I followed this up with pieces using various print techniques in Karen Edin’s FORUM ’97 class. I met Sue Dove there and discovered we had a dear mutual friend in Cornwall. Hazel Berriman was known to Sue as the much-loved Director of the Penlee House Museum and Art Gallery, Penzance. Hazel had been my trainee art assistant when I was Keeper of Art at the Bolton Museum and Art Gallery in 1966-7. I had last been to see her in 1996 when she arranged key appointments for me on my Churchill Fellowship tour. It was Sue who contacted me with news of Hazel’s untimely death in 1998.

Below, ‘Bed of Nettles’ made 2011, handspun nettle thread from Nepal, hand knitted. 90 x 200 x 2cm. Exhibition in ‘NeTlines, Belconnen Arts Centre, 2012 and in ‘Nets’ the TAFTA Geelong FORUM 2012 (Sinclaire Gallery). Photo by Dean Buttters.
In April 1999 I took part in Sue Dove’s class on *Mythical Creatures – Alternative Dolls* at FORUM ’99 in Mittagong. When back in England in 2000, I visited her in Cornwall. Shortly after she was exhibiting in my old stamping ground, Kendal, near the Lake District, with Jeanette Appleton. Sue advised me to enrol for Jeanette’s feltmaking workshop so I took a working holiday and connected up with an old friend who had both of us to stay. Jeanette was to become a huge influence on my work.

Later she stayed with me in my studio flat at Mary Burkett’s ‘retirement home’, Isel Hall, which housed Mary’s fabulous felt collection. Jeanette encouraged me to experiment with the industrial feltmaking machines at Huddersfield University. I was studying for my MA at the time and that was how I got to know Angie Wyman – my pathway leader. *(Angie Wyman is now the Course Leader, Degree Programmes for the RSN - Royal School of Needlework, London).*

On my return to Australia in 2006 I began negotiating to bring Angie Wyman to Australia …and here we come full circle as I participated in Angie’s *Family History* workshop at the Geelong FORUM 2012.

*Above, a view of Nancy Tingey’s work exhibited in the Sinclaire Gallery, Geelong Grammar School during TAFTA’s 2012 Geelong FORUM.*

*This completes the story on Nancy Tingey, at least to June 2015… with her love of making, it is certain she will continue to create, and to mentor, for as long as possible.* — Janet De Boer