

AN ARTFUL LIFE

A catalogue for *Over Time*, a retrospective exhibition by Nancy Tingey
at the Woolshed Gallery, Strathnairn Arts, 13 July-11 August 2024



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, entwined with an unerring sensitivity that is powerful in its elegance and simplicity.

Jacqueline Schultze, *Netlines* catalogue, 2012.

Nancy Tingey has been practicing art for over 60 years. Her artistic journey has taken her from England, to travels through Europe, Scandinavia, North America and numerous countries in the Asia-Pacific region. She has spent over half a century reflecting on and creating art about her life as a migrant, contemplating the interplay between her home country of England and her adopted home of Australia. And over time, she has been true to her artistic sensibility, that of being attune to the interconnectedness of line, form and materials.

It could be said that fibre is woven into Nancy's DNA. Brought up in the middle of textile country, Nancy could hear the whirr of the mill machinery on her way to school. Her grandfather and uncle were involved with cotton mill and feltworks operations, and Nancy was taught by her mother to make her own clothes from the textile remnants sourced locally.

She studied Fine Art at the University of Durham, specialising in stained glass and painting. As a student of the ground breaking Developing Process designed by Richard Hamilton and Victor Pasmore in the 1960s in the UK, she was influenced by abstract art movements and the nature of materials. She then explored these leadings further thorough her practices in a variety of visual art media.

Community, networking and being connected to the landscape are important aspects of Nancy's work ethic. As evidenced even in her very early works, she has always been inspired by landscape forms. For her "...it is...always about respecting the natural environment, exploring its aesthetic possibilities and allowing the materials to dictate form. The meditative process of gathering the materials generate(s) the feeling of being at one with my surroundings."¹

To bring together the works for this exhibition Nancy and I have delved into her extensive archive of journal articles and reference materials, retrieving packed away artworks and negotiating with several owners of previously purchased artworks to loan us their cherished pieces. Preparing for the show has been hard work—"a real eye opener" for Nancy. But it has been rewarding work as well, as she reviewed the trajectory and output of her artistic journey.

Over Time is also about the present. The newest works in the exhibition include subtle, monochromatic watercolours of Lake George / Weereewa created in May this year. These works sit solidly within her oeuvre, capturing the nuances of this particular landscape to which she has responded countless times since first coming to Australia.

Front page image: *Lead down under*, 2009, goose down, cotton, lead and white paint,
5cm each x 220cm (detail).

HALL

1971-1999

Nancy felt optimistic about her move to Australia, planning on continuing her artistic career, but she realised after a few months in the country, that she was much less certain than before about her sense of direction. In 1971, Nancy and Bob moved into a 10-year-old weatherboard house in Hall—a small peaceful village outside of Canberra, with a caring atmosphere. Acclimatising to a new country was more difficult than she imagined...that feeling of peace eluded her. She found the dry brittle landscape, the harsh light which drained the colours and the strange trees, with their dead leaves sagging, left her uninspired. ²

In time, Nancy grew to accept her new environment. She and Bob carved out new garden space at their Hall home, replacing rose bushes and formal arrangements with native plants and gently curving paths. The landscape colours began to slowly resonate with Nancy. In creating the work *Black wattle and gum trees, Hall garden* (1974), she recalled "I had never seen yellow like that in England!"



Black wattle and gum trees, Hall garden, oil on canvas, 1974, 53.5 x 67 cm

She began painting again and in 1978, undertaking stained glass commissions. Briefly back in England, she had been asked by her old school, Bury Grammar School, Lancashire, to do a small commission. She gathered offcuts from Hartley Wood, world renowned makers of

hand-blown glass at the time, and went back to creating glass appliques, shipping back to Australia the remaining off-cuts and tools. She continued these occasional commissions but found the work impractical while caring for three small boys.

Nancy carried on painting and working in glass for several years, taking commissions, until life with three small children and constant travelling with Bob for his work and overseas trips back to the UK, became increasingly challenging.



Image: Working with stained glass, Hall, 1982



Image: *Untitled*, 1963, stained glass, wood, 22.5 x 24 cm

PATCHWORK

"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." ³

Thus began a decades-long involvement with creating numerous and intricate patchwork designs for family, friends and community art projects. Nancy found that the skills developed in her stained glass work were transferrable to pieced textile design, and assemblage steps of patchwork.

With patchwork, Nancy did not need a studio, could work interrupted and was able to transport the projects during travels and artistic treks in Australia and overseas. The idling became an obsession. Here at last was the answer to creating large pieces of work while relating to erratic time schedules determined by children and a geologist husband who travelled the world for his work. 3000 hexagons later Nancy had created "My Three Sons" (aka "Tingey Triads", aka "My first quilt") a double-size bed cover to present to her mother-in-law on the occasion of her eldest son's 40th birthday. Symbolising both women's three sons, Nancy developed the work with inter-relating groups of triads.

*"Part of the fascination I experienced with this new (to me) medium was to do with the absorbing activity of playing with colour. Changing the character of a colour by introducing it to new neighbours (was) the aspect of patchwork I enjoy(ed) most."*⁴

As commissions came along Nancy began to incorporate the elements of the intended owner's personality and life style into the work. She experimented with building two-dimensional surfaces on which three-dimensional effects occur, manipulating patches outside of the confines of grouping. Colour relationships tended to range more broadly over a piece, with the irregular edges determined by the internal structure set up by the internal structure set up by the body of colour.⁵



Image left: *Reflections*, 1994, pure silk offcuts from handwoven Thai silk, 28 x 31.5 cm (detail). Image right (from bottom): *My three sons* (*First patchwork quilt*); *Red, white and blue patchwork quilt*, 1981; *Last quilt for Mother and Father*, 2000.

THE PIECE PROCESS: MANTLE

In 1993 Nancy was involved in a communal art project with five other Canberra textile artists (Bonnie Begg, Marlene Greenwood, Joan James, Margaret Roberts, Jenny Stephens) to make *The Mantle of Unity*, a 7m x 3m wall hanging for the inaugural meeting of the National Council of Churches in Canberra.

As was fitting with the ecumenicity of the new NCCA Council, the artists came from several different Canberra faith communities. The wall hanging represented the mantle passed from Elijah to Elisha and was a visible expression of the transitioning of the old Australian Council of Churches to the new National Council.

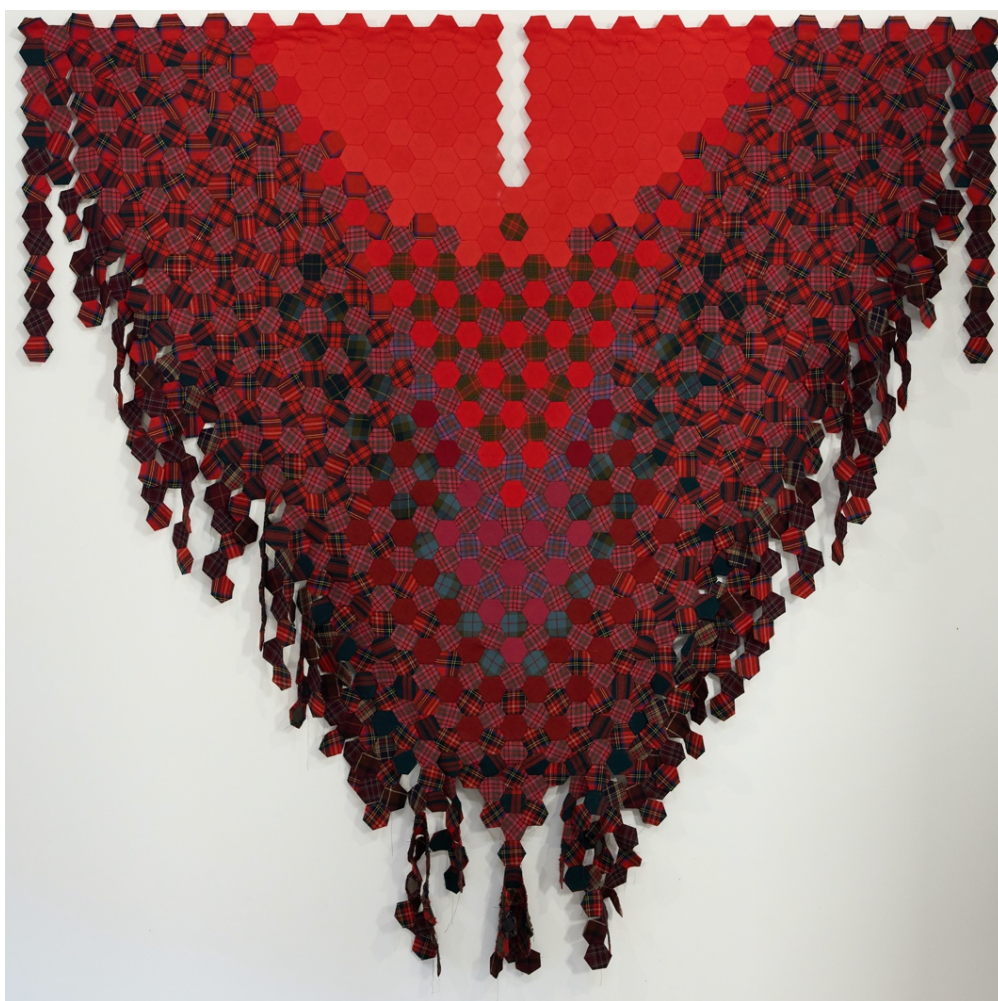


Image: *The piece process: Mantle*, 1994, hand-pieced, wool/cotton blend, paper, 168 x 168 cm

The piece process: Mantle (above) was Nancy's own version of the NCCA wall hanging. Irregular and uneven edges hang tendril-like, with open spaces integral to the overall balance of the work, its title alluding to the intricate nature of negotiating peace amidst conflicting and divergent interests.



Image: *The piece process, Mantle* (detail)

"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 realised 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 ..."

In 2005, she made a green version the same size and shape as the *Red Mantle*, called *Greenmantle* which was hung in the "Last and Lost Quilt Show" from where it was purchased by Annette Gero for her Australian Quilt Collection. It was named after the book by John Buchan which her father read to her, and her brother and sister on family holidays.

SHIFTING TIES

...old school ties
 ...old boys' network
 ...renewing ties
 ...shifting landscapes

In the early 1990s Nancy continued to reflect on her life in two worlds, creating works that spoke to her migrant experience, shifting as she did between being enmeshed in her beloved landscapes and family/friend connections in the UK and those newer connections and terrain in Australia.

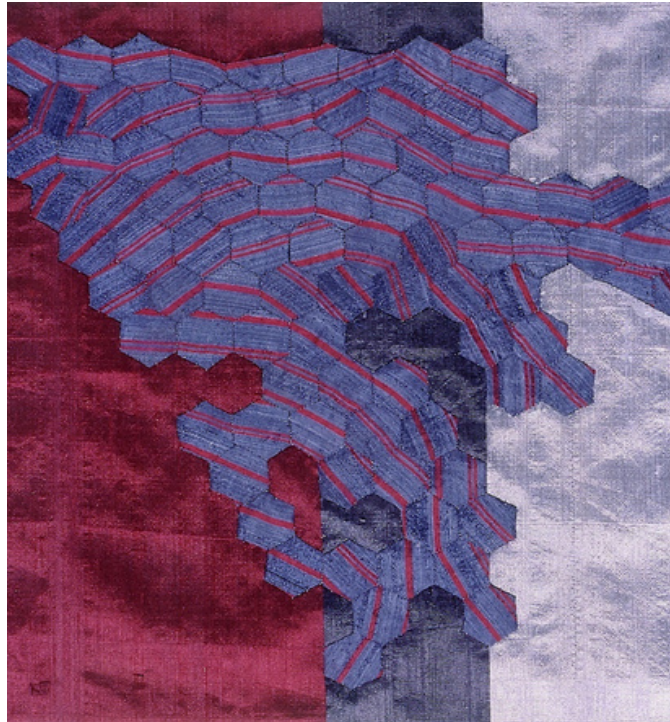


Image: *Renewing Ties*, 1994, silk recycled ties, 30 x 30 cm (Private collection)

An inveterate collector of fabric scraps and off-cut materials, she began using old neck ties given to her by family and friends, to create works exploring the lost, shifting and renewed ties to old networks, and connections to new ones.



In her 1994 onwards art journal entitled “The Black Tie Book”, this exploration can be seen to include the concepts of shifting, dissolving landscapes and evolving connections to old familiar places and imagery, whilst seeking to embrace her new home country.

(Image: *Renewing old school ties*, watercolour on paper, 1994, detail)

The use of line – through thread, the lines of a net, or the line of the horizon—is ever-present in these studies. The manipulation of materials, whether through cutting, piecing, tying or embellishing, is fundamental to the expression of her artistic response to her emotional landscape.

ANZSES EXPEDITION 1994

From late to mid-October September 1994 Nancy participated with several others in an expedition organised by the Australian and New Zealand Scientific Exploration Society to the Arkaringa Hills, north of Coober Pedy in the region known as the Painted Desert. It is geologically significant as it illustrates the effects of prolonged weathering. The rugged landscape, the result of an ancient inland sea, is a South Australian example of terrain known as Badlands or Breakaway topography. The region is also of biological significance, noted for a number of rare plant species.

The Arkaringa (ANZSES) Survey is part of the Biological Survey of South Australia Program which is a series of systematic surveys conducted across the state between 1971 and the present with the broad aim of providing a baseline inventory of South Australia's flora and fauna biodiversity.



Image: The Painted Desert, watercolour on paper, 1995, 74 x 95 cm

Forty women in five groups of eight collected samples for the South Australian Museum. Nancy was inspired by the oranges, reds, blues and ochre colours of the Painted Desert area which were a brilliant backdrop for her daily forays into the field. Wildlife, rock formations, old building remnants and campsite imagery were sketched and recorded, ideas stored away and then called upon to later create works in watercolour, pastel and fibre.

The expedition was a seminal experience for Nancy. It not only brought her together with fascinating people living in community to focus on the survey work, but also allowed her the time out from normal everyday demands to sink down into creative contemplation. It was also the first step in her comparing the landscapes of Australia and England as she researched material for her art therapy project on living two lives.

JOURNEY WITH PARKINSON'S

In 1987, a journey began for Nancy and her family that none could have anticipated. At the age of 46, Bob was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. During the following years, the family continued to travel between the UK and Australia, whilst Bob carried on with his work as a geologist. From 1987-1994, Nancy, faced with the changes Bob's diagnosis would bring to their family, and that she might have to become the fulltime breadwinner, returned to the workforce with positions as a curator and lecturer with the Australian War Memorial, Information/Education officer at the National Museum of Australia, recreational art lecturer with SAEC, Copland, Ginninderra and Hawker Colleges and Gallery Guide at the National Gallery of Australia.

Nancy juggled work and family life with occasional stained glass commissions, printmaking, exhibiting her quilt works in group shows, and in 1986, held a solo show "Discipline and Freedom" at Abbot Hall Art Gallery, in Kendal, UK.



Brain study, 1995, print on fabric, netting, stitching, 41 x 34cm

Several works in *Over Time* relate to her personal journey as she sought to understand repercussions of the illness and its effects on family and her artistic self. The continued examination of reconfigured networks and connections, flowed into and meshed with investigations of changing neural pathways and personal self-reflections.

Studies of the brain and the changes brought on by Parkinson's---*the left side of the brain is impaired in Parkinson's, but the right side – the creative ability – is not*⁶-- translated not only into artworks but also into the founding of a painting class for people with Parkinson's. Combining her career as a practising visual artist, curator and educator with her role as a primary carer, Nancy founded the TPwP (Tingey Painting with Parkinsons) program in 1994. As well as painting, each session involved meditation, music or poetry to bring out the creative process.

In 1991 Nancy 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. In Liz Jeneid's Tamworth 1995 Masterclass, Nancy was introduced to machine stitching on paper, and began a series of works about the brain. She followed this up with pieces using various print techniques in Karen Edin's TAFTA FORUM '97 class. The workshops were always about ideas and how to solve them in textile-related media.

Having no experience in art therapy, Nancy received a Churchill Fellowship in 1996 which enabled her to travel the world to meet experts in neurology and art therapy. She has been a pioneer globally in using painting as therapy for Parkinson's and other neurodegenerative conditions.

Since 1999, John Pratt has been the Canberra group's facilitator. Nancy has published two works in this area: *Arts Therapies and Progressive Illness - Nameless Dread* - chapter contribution (2002), and *Magic Happens - the story of Painting with Parkinsons* (2018). For her Parkinson's work Nancy received the WPC (World Parkinson Coalition), Robin Elliott Award for Service to the Community in 2019; OAM, Order of Australia Medal for service to community health in 2019.⁷

LIMESTONE PAVEMENT

The two Limestone Pavement works in *Over Time* are part of a number of studies of the limestone pavements in the north of England where Nancy lived for some years. She has revisited this area many times during her lifetime, both whilst living in the UK and then in the years following her migration to Australia. The lines and formations in this unique landscape are subtly referenced in many of Nancy's works, and are envisioned more substantially here in watercolour and print.

Referring to the work, *Limestone pavement, revisited*:

This is one of my favourite places near the cottage to which my parents retired to escape industrial Lancashire. Their ashes are scattered on the top of the hill in the foreground.

In 1975 Nancy's parents-in-law gave her a copy of *Fellwanderer* by Alfred Wainwright, to remind her of the Lake District while she was living in Australia. By that time, she had been away for nearly four years. *(The cover of Wainwright's book can be seen photocopied and pasted into many of Nancy's art journals over the years.)*

Even when a child Alfred Wainwright walked a great deal, up to 20 miles at a time; he also showed a great interest in drawing and cartography, producing his own maps of England and his local area. In 1930, at the age of 23, Wainwright saved up enough money for a week's walking holiday in the Lake District, where Wainwright saw his first view of the Lakeland fells. This moment marked the start of what he would later describe as his love affair with the Lake District. Wainwright's love of the Lake District, wandering the fells and mapping this landscape resonated with Nancy and spoke to her keen interest in these same things.

"My father starting collecting his books as soon as they came out. Seven altogether written over 13 years. And said that the only problem was there was nothing to discover on Lake District walks as Wainwright had already recorded it in the guide books! He was the Kendal town treasurer when I worked at Abbot Hall Art Gallery (1968-70) but I never actually met him. A local legend."



Limestone pavement, revisited, 2020, print on paper, 42 x 52 cm

WOOLSHED QUILT

A 1994 trip to Arkaringa South Australia---with the ANZSES expedition---was the starting point for the Woolshed quilt.

After discovering a corrugated iron structure straddling a river bed to stem the flow of water, hanging like a curtain or running fence, Nancy took numerous photographs and did countless sketches. Intrigued by the possibility of suggesting the texture of corrugated iron (a building material common to both Australia and England) in textiles, and combining this with imagery referring to the Australian landscape, the *Woolshed* concept began to emerge.



During a six-month residency at ANCA in 1998-1999, Nancy made a series of three woolshed quilts, as a counterpoint to the American-style log-cabin quilt. Her aim was to develop a unique response to the Australian landscape -- an Australian vernacular-- using corduroy offcuts from a trouser factory that she had sourced in Hobart when living there in 1985-86.

Image: *Woolshed quilt*, 1999, cotton corduroy and woolbag hessian reverse dyed, machine and hand stitched, 143 x 110 cm. (Private collection.)

To reflect the ad hoc form of corrugated iron she manipulated the material as little as possible. The corduroy was reverse dyed [bleached] then machine and hand stitched using simple crazy patchwork techniques. Some areas are glued. This was exhibited in the first 'Explorers' exhibition at the Spiral Gallery in Bega in April 1999.

(The Explorer group developed from a discussion held at the Textile Forum in Mittagong in 1995, between Canberra-based artists Marjo Jones, Joan James, Val Smith and Nancy,

determined to carry on the creative spirit of the Forum. They became a group of six when Lynne Johnson and Karen Nienaber joined, and would meet at one another's houses, holding several exhibitions over the course of 7 years.)

TWO LIVES

"Two-Ply—to go backwards and forwards—this had become the story of my life. I had divided my time almost equally between Australia and England, ending up feeling disoriented and rootless." ⁸

In September 2002, Nancy moved to a studio at Isel Hall in Cumbria in the north of England, and enrolled to study for an MA in Contemporary Applied Art (Textiles) at the Cumbria Institute of the Arts. Nancy came to Isel Hall at the invitation of Mary Burkett, author and owner of the Hall, with whom Nancy had worked when Burkett was director of Abbott Hall and Nancy was Education Officer and Keeper of Pictures at the Abbot Hall Art Gallery from 1968-70.



Working in textiles seemed appropriate, as the symbolism of terms such as fibres of being, fabric of life and going with the flow matched her brief. Through textiles Nancy could see things from two sides, and also embed fibre and ply threads as part of the creative process. Each early piece incorporated the hand-felting together of layers of Merino (Australia) and Herdwick (England) wool. The symbolism of working with migrating fibres was an apt metaphor for Nancy's academic investigation.

Image: *Two lives series: Early study, mapping Hall and the Lake District, 2002*, felted wool panel (Herdwick and white Merino wools) in wood frame, (panel: 28 x 24 cm; frame: 35.5 x 29 cm)

*"I wanted people to understand the nostalgia one experiences when you are dislodged from your home base. This sense of dislocation is something all migrants have in common."*⁹

Nancy had only dabbled in feltmaking through participating in one of Jeanette Appleton's workshops and it was Jeanette who introduced her to the needlefelting machines at Huddlesfield University. Jeanette had been experimenting with these machines to manipulate Merino wool, 'Crossing boundaries' and extending possibilities in fibre manipulation. After much sampling in her first year of study, Nancy decided to run with feltmaking as a physical manifestation of migration.¹⁰ In 2002, Jeanette Appleton was an artist-in-residence and tutor for workshops at Huddlesfield.



Image: *Two lives series: Back to the fold*, 2004, Herdwick and merino wools, felted, with wool threads and stitched panel, 68cm x 30m (Image credit: Wendy Dawes)

Nancy's second year in the program was spent working with the Dilo feltmaking machine in the Textile Department of Huddersfield University. The machine deconstructed the 'tops' by carding them - breaking down the old lifestyle to build the new – then piled up the layers to create a firm but gauze-like length of textile. After some initial stumbles, Nancy was able to produce continuous lengths of needle-felted cloth beginning with Herdwick (symbolising her upbringing in the north of England) connecting with Merino (life in Canberra), then moving on to more Herdwick. Later, lengths introduced small quantities of Herdwick and merino juxtaposed, representing visits.

"No-one before me had used Herdwick wool on these machines and since then the machines have been de-commissioned, making my work unique."

Travel routes were created by embedding handspun lengths of Merino and Herdwick wools onto the length of 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, each representing duality. Some fibres also trapped the threads in between the two cloth layers. The resulting installation relocated the rollercoaster flow of cloth searching for a resting place, or home.

The interplay between the flow and dance of fibre manipulation and the relentless motion of the needlefelt machine mirrored the sensation Nancy experienced while flying between countries. This phenomenon inspired a short film, *Fabric of life*, made with media student Danielle Shaw.

"Two lives as division could be turned around to read that having multiple living experiences could make one stronger and more whole. Is the whole greater than the sum of the parts?"

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*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."*¹²



Two lives series: Back to the fold, 2004 (detail)

COLLABORATIONS

Jane Liddell-King

The Golden Calf

Juxtapositions

Cambridge-based Jane Liddell-King is a poet, playwright, critic and teacher who, in 2004, became the first Jewish woman to win the Seatonian Prize awarded annually in the University of Cambridge for a poem on a sacred subject. The poem "The Golden Calf" inspired a rich collaboration with Nancy whom she had met in 1977 in Cambridge. Jane and Nancy kept in touch even though over most of the next 40 years Nancy lived in Australia and Jane remained in Cambridge.

In 2006, Jane and Nancy held a combined poetry reading and exhibition of "The Golden Calf" images and watercolours at Michaelhouse in Cambridge. While visiting in London in 2014 Nancy made a recording of Jane reading the poem which can be found on YouTube. The illustrated booklet was launched in 2022.

Image: *The water of loss and shame, no. 18, 2006, original watercolour with pen and ink, 10 x 9.8 cm (unframed)*



In 2018, Jane came to Australia as poet-in-residence at Strathnairn Arts. There they held another collaborative event titled 'Juxtapositions' which featured both poems by Jane Liddell-King and illustrations by Nancy.

Jackie Scammell

The Edge, Series I & II

Having a background of working as a painter on paper, artist Jackie Scammell progressed to making her own pulp and working with freshly-formed sheets. The pulp is made locally

from macerating and beating rags and half-prepared linen, cotton and hemp. The fascination comes from the endless possibilities when forming sheets in this age-old tradition, or manipulating the pulp before it becomes paper.

"From 2002 to 2006 I collaborated with Scammell in Cumbria by producing works in which paper and watercolour were of equal value. The first "Edge" series was made for an exhibition at The Edge Gallery in Lancaster UK in 2006 when I was looking at the way the edges of different papers behaved when exposed to watermedia."



When I left England later that year UK papermaker and dear colleague Jackie Scammell gave a box of her handmade paper to work on when I settled back in Australia. The Series II works are the result of that collaboration."

Image: *Along the edge II*,
2006, watercolour on
handmade paper, 70 x 64 cm.

CROSSING CONTINENTS

Rugs using recycled fabrics pulled in small pieces or hooked in strips through hessian (burlap) backing for a shaggy or loop pile effect were known in different places by various names, including 'proddy', 'hooky', 'proggy' and 'cloodie mat'. It has been argued by Ann Macbeth (Glasgow School of Needlework – but who also lived in the Lake District) that Viking settlers in the 9th and 10th centuries brought looped Rya rug weaving techniques to the north of England via the Shetland Islands, Scotland then Cumbria. The shaggy, looped pile was eventually translated into the British rag rugs we know today.¹³

In February 2002, Nancy visited Miriam Miller at her Narrawilly Rug Room in Milton NSW, to learn how rag rugs were created and experiment with the process. Miriam, President Emeritus of the Australian Rugmakers Guild, was elected the Guild's first President in 2008 and was also the President of The International Guild of Handhooking Rugmakers for the period 2009-2012. Miriam began rug hooking in the 1970s, going back to her roots in the north of England, Whickham in County Durham near Newcastle on Tyne, to begin her journey into rug making. Miriam had a cousin send her a tool and asked her father to teach her how to make the proggy rugs. As a young man, Miriam's father had helped her grandmother make rugs for their home in England. ¹⁴

In April 2003, mid-way in her MA program, Nancy took a hooky rug making workshop with textile artist Debbie Siniska at Cumbria Institute, and began work on creating *Crossing continents*.

In her 'Black Tie Book' journal, Nancy jotted down explorative ideas for the work:

...concept of tracking the land, making an impression, magic carpet, travel

...the pathways are like wanderings, now set in the memory recorded by the artwork

...the hook is from Australia (originally Irish) and rags from England. Rhythmic relationship set up between the two...



Crossing continents, 2003, hookey' rag rug, wool and cotton remnants, on hessian backing

NET WORKING

My work is about process – forms evolving according to the nature of materials and the way they are manipulated. Nancy Tingey, 2009

NETWORKS

Nancy has long held an interest in netting and pondered the endless metaphors and permutations for its structure. Recollecting about the work *Marmalade cover camouflage net* in this exhibition:

The interest in nets began when I was a curator in the Australian War Memorial (1990) and became interested in my work there on the way artists were brought in during World Wars to camouflage ships and camps. Some, to cover tents the troops hid under, were very beautiful.

As evidenced in her artist journals on display in *Over Time*, her travels have also provided rich imagery for her to contemplate---hand-netted curtains in Malta; the draping quality of hand-plied core rope made by women in Kerala India, seen on an artists' retreat in 2004; the structural patterns made by fishermen's nets laid out on the beaches¹⁵; and fences constructed of net-like grids in Cumbrian sheep fields and Australian paddocks---all studied, sketched and filed away for later creative projects. Eventually, she taught herself to make nets.

2008 marked a year of exciting new directions for Nancy. Whilst working on various projects and ideas having to do with nets, she considered the idea of creating networks literally and metaphorically, as a way of linking fellow artists.¹⁶ By 2009, discussions with friends and colleagues led to the development of an international Nets Project, established through academic connections in the textile departments of three universities: Cumbria University in the UK, ANU in Canberra and University of Turku, Finland. Commonalities, differences, shared concerns and interests were shared through a Nets Project blog. Each university agreed to explore their own responses to 'Nets' with individual exhibitions at each location. The final culminating event was a conference and collaborative exhibition at the University of Turku, Finland in 2011.¹⁷

Simultaneously, Nancy founded **Networks Australia** in 2008, joining with like-minded colleagues to share ideas, skills, resources and hold group exhibitions. Today Networks Australia continues as Nancy envisioned. Networks members work across a range of media but many have a textile background. The group includes leading arts educators whose influence in their medium has been profound, alongside those at the early stages of their art journey.

"The Networks Australia artists...understand both the textile context in which they developed and the gallery context their work is placed into. They sit comfortably within a contemporary art gallery because they engage with ideas, have something to say, and are aware of both the long history of art and the contemporary artworld. That is, they are aware of the context in which they are situated." ¹⁸

Networks members continue to pursue their projects, and most recently in May 2024, held an exhibition *Creating Apart, Together* at M16 Artspace.



Camouflage net, 1995, shredded silk, machine-stitched with cotton thread, 90 x 90cm (detail).
Credit: Andrew Sikorski.



Black birds net nest, 2010, shredded plastic bird netting, 9 x 16 x 16 cm

For "Bird Net Nest" I cut through the squares of the netting to make spikey lines, then wound the thread like winding a ball of wool up and down to get the threads to catch— not hard as the spiky bits help hold the form. I had tried crocheting and knitting with the thread but the spikes got me hopelessly confused. The winding technique ended up being very simple, though I used up nearly all the half metre sample of netting for this one small piece and my source has dried up. It's a horrid material to use on trees. However, a friend managed to get me vast quantities of the same material in black, (salvaged from a vineyard), which has its own sinister qualities.

THE AUSTRALIAN FORUM FOR TEXTILE ARTS CONFERENCES

The impact of TAFTA and the Textile FORUM conferences and the magic found there



Untitled, 1999, oil pastel on paper, 72 x 53 cm

BACKGROUND

A small group called AFTA (Australian Forum for Textile Arts) had formed in 1974 at a meeting held at Sturt workshops, Mittagong, NSW, at which they agreed to meet biennially. Mittagong became a permanent 'home' for a week each April for 14 years until 2004. International and nationally renowned artists were invited to tutor exceptional textile, fibre, and/or complementary workshops in their field of specialization. Nancy attended numerous Textile Fibre Forums, valuing the learning opportunities for fibre arts skill building and the linking up with the diverse community of artists who populated the events.

FORUMS

The 1984 Fibre Interchange Workshop (the 4th Biennial AFTA Conference) with artist Liz Jeneid on expressive mark making, made a deep impression on Nancy with the rediscovery that playing with materials was important for the regeneration of ideas. Central to this was Liz's query "How do you express emotion, in line, in your work?" At this workshop she paired up with Carol Divall and through her she was offered an exhibition at Fibre Design, Goulburn, in 1994.

"Liz came to stay with me when I was living with my family in Hobart in early 1986 so she could run 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 1968 to 1970."

Life "intervened", and Nancy did not attend another **TAFTA FORUM** until **1991** in **Mittagong**. The "draw" was Fay (later known as Fahy) Bottrell, editor of one of Nancy's

favourite books *The Artist Craftsman in Australia*. Bottrell introduced challenging opportunities: making threads out of shredded textiles and then into shapes (this resonated a few years later when Nancy 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); and 'taking a line for a walk'. These concepts emerged in several of Nancy's later works, including *Two ply*, the final work from her MA program. which appears in *Over Time*.

Nancy took part in Liz Jeneid's **1995 TAFTA FORUM Tamworth** Masterclass, was introduced to machine stitching on paper, and began a series of works about the brain. She followed this up with pieces using various print techniques in Karen Edin's **FORUM 1997** class.

At the TAFTA FORUM '97 she met rag rug maker and fibre artist Sue Dove from Cornwall, and at the April **1999 FORUM**, took part in Sue's class on Mythical Creatures – Alternative Dolls. Upon Sue's advice Nancy, on returning to England, enrolled in a felt-making workshop run by Jeanette Appleton. Jeanette was to become a huge influence on Nancy's work, encouraging her to experiment with the industrial feltmaking machines at Huddersfield University (where Nancy used the Dilo feltmaking machines for her final MA project work).

INDIA 2004



In January 2004, Nancy took an art holiday to Kerala India, during her MA study (which was quite conceptually-based), to get back into painting.

Tea plantation !, 2004, watercolour on paper, 27 x 37 cm (unframed)

Notes from Nancy's accompanying India art journal:

...at the beach as the catch comes in ...the fish gathered into baskets and the nets folded ready to be spread across the sand for drying and mending. Looped and swathed, the laciness stretched over many metres. Incredibly beautiful – organic – pliable – suggesting endless possibilities...

...working on MA project Two Lives, Two Ply... plying Merino wool (Australia) and Herdwick wool (UK) representing my life shared between the two hemispheres. Making wool nets of 5-inch gauge as soft versions of fences, the trapped wool becoming the trapper. (K)not Nets.

... (re: my MA work) draped as installations they integrate with the environment like the nets drying in Kerala. Textiles reform as they adapt to their supports. Spanning spaces while linking forms...

LANDSCAPE CONNECTIONS



*Cumbrian landscape, 2003, felted wool panel,
mounted on canvas, 41 x 41cm*

"This felt piece was made in a workshop at Glaramara, a hostel in the North Lakes among mountains my father loved to climb. He is the knob on the hill; he had just died.

I was introduced to the Lakes by my father and his aunt when I was five and I climbed my first real mountain when I was eight.

I have asked for my ashes to be scattered in the area."

EXPLORING LINES

Works about lines, in various media, which evolved as Nancy was trying to work out how to release materials from a supporting structure and how to express the sense of freedom felt in flying.



Fence lines I, 2009, seven lines of Herdwick wool and cotton thread, machine stitched length, 190cm variable, each line 12cm width

LAKE GEORGE / WEEREewa

"When I first saw Lake George/Weereewa in 1971, I was reminded of the landscape I had just left behind in the North of England. Morecambe Bay is a dangerous tidal stretch of mudflats, the estuaries of five rivers feeding into the Irish sea, creating quicksands. Yet when the tide is out all appears calm. A spiritual place.

I determined to make this the focus of new work...then life happened and it was some years before I could concentrate on the Lake. By then the Quaker Centre, Silver Wattle, had been established on its shore. I became involved in several artists' retreats there, building up this series of watercolours between 2019 and 2024."



Lake George study, no.4, 2020, watercolour on paper, 12 x 41 cm



Lake George/Weereewa, early study, No.2, 2019, watercolour on paper, 42 x 52 cm



Lake George (Weereewa), May 2024, No.9, 2024, 41 x 53 cm

OVER FLOW



Over Flow is the last work made for this exhibition.

"For a while I shared a community garden plot with my son Sam who grew the globe artichoke plant. We let it go to seed and this piece is made of the fluffy seed heads connected by fine nylon thread. Linking family and place."

Over flow, 2024, artichoke seed heads, glass bowl, nylon thread, variable.

FOOTNOTES

¹ 2113: *A Canberra odyssey*, Canberra Museum and Gallery, 2013, exhibition catalogue, p.25.

² Power, Prue, "A portrait of the artist as a busy mother", *Home Beautiful*, September 1982, pp 42-47.

³ <https://nancytingey.net>

⁴ Tingey Nancy, "Self portraits", *Fibre Forum*, Vol.3, No.3, 1984, p.27.

⁵ Ibid, p27.

⁶ "The transformational impact of painting", The Hospital Research Foundation Group Parkinson's, 18 June 2024, <https://fightingparkinsons.org.au/news/latest-news/the-transformational-impact-of-painting/>

⁷ Ibid, <https://nancytingey.net>

⁸ "Nancy Tingey-Two ply", *Textile Fibre Forum*, no.87, 2007, pps 46-47

⁹ "Two become one in an artistic creation", *Standard Guardian, UK*, 1 September 2005.

¹⁰ "Two ply / UK", Nancy Tingey, *Echoes, The Journal of the International Feltmakers Association*, Issue 80, 2005/3, pp12-13.

¹¹ Nancy Tingey, *MA Journal* 2002.

¹² Op. cit., <https://nancytingey.net>

¹³ Karen Griffiths, *Networks blog*, <https://networks.wordpress.com/2010/02/05/turku-story-rug/>

¹⁴ Rug Hooking Australia, <https://www.rughookingaustralia.com.au/history-australian-rug-history/australian-rugmakers/miller-miriam-new-south-wales/>

¹⁵ "Nancy Tingey, spinner of webs", Kerry-Anne Cousins, *Textile Fibre Forum*, no.97, 2010, p47.

¹⁶ Ibid, p47.

¹⁷ <https://networks.wordpress.com/>

¹⁸ "Tree conversations: networking with the wood-wide-web", Susan Wood, *Textile Fibre Forum*, Issue #140, December 2020, pp49-53.

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