

June 2020

In Conversation with Fraser Taylor

In 2011, Panel's first project and partnership with Atelier E.B, 'The Inventors of Tradition', uncovered and linked aspects of Scotland's unique heritage in textile production in order to re-examine local culture, forge new connections and extend the ideas and provocations presented within their first clothing and accessory collection of the same name.

An exhibition, held in an empty retail unit on Stockwell Street, Glasgow included a network of 20th century textile and clothing examples from Scottish designers, brands and companies, borrowed from store rooms and personal wardrobes, many on public display for the first time. Amongst them, presented alongside Glasgow retail mecca, The Warehouse, were examples of clothing, marketing and magazine features from The Cloth, an art and design collective, formed by David Band, Brian Bolger, Helen Manning and Fraser Taylor whilst studying at The Royal College of Art. The pieces, kindly loaned by Fraser, represented the true interdisciplinary and collaborative nature of the collective, which blended fashion and textiles, pop culture, music, fine

art and graphic design into a short yet prolific period (1983-1987) and highlighted its links to Glasgow. Fraser's collection is now held by Glasgow School of Art (GSA), where Fraser studied in the textile department, and is available to view [online](#).



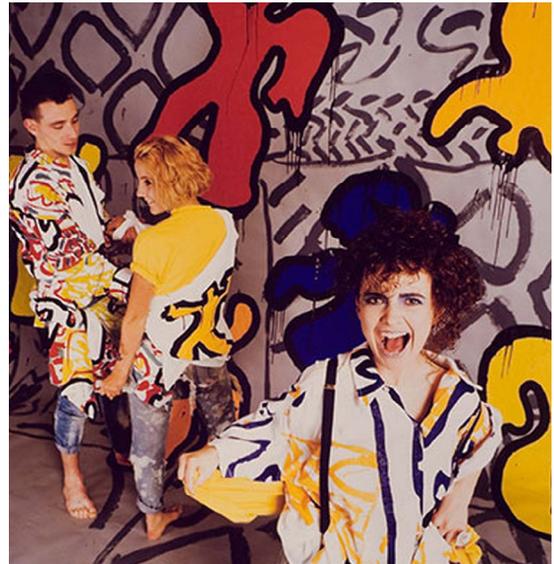
Fraser, you studied printed textiles at GSA but had initially planned to study painting. What was it that drew you to fabric and print in the end?

I went to Glasgow School of Art in 1977. At the end of a foundation year, which was located in Blythswood Square, each student developed a portfolio to submit to the department they wished to study. My portfolio was being prepared to be submitted to Drawing and Painting but then I was advised to go and visit the Department of Printed Textiles. I was knocked over by its ferocious energy and the dynamic vigour of experimentation and exploration. Colour was important to me and Printed Textiles embraced colour whereas Drawing and Painting seemed to have a very conventional approach promoting a neutral colour pallet. The programme in Printed Textiles imposed an understanding of print and its historical and contemporary relationship to cloth and encouraged investigation into silkscreen printings' relationship to sculpture, performance, the body, graphics and illustration. It was committed to a discipline which was interdisciplinary. This seemed very liberating. Although located within the School of Design there was a pulse of Fine Art thinking with emphasis on studying the expansive field of drawing and how mark making could be transferred onto cloth. There were very few set projects. Students were given freedom, encouraged to develop their own interests without limitation and to apply print to multiple surfaces with self-determined outcome. The decision to switch to Printed Textiles was a good one. My time there was seminal and has been the underpinning of my continuing practice.

Glasgow in the early '80s saw the emergence of new music scenes, with the arrival of Postcard Records and new wave/ post-punk bands hailing from the city. Can you say a little about the connection between music and art and the creative atmosphere in Glasgow during your student years?

Glasgow was an exciting place to be in the late '70s and early '80s as there was a lot of force around GSA and the musical movements in Glasgow. There was an urgency in the air, although we were unaware of what that would lead to. Glasgow's thriving social scene was central in bringing

music and art together. Bars and clubs were where people from a range of creative communities met to exchange ideas and establish collaborations. The Rock Garden, a bar located on Queen Street, was the main venue for these gatherings. Art School dances were held every week in the Haldane Building or the Victoria Café. These renowned events hosted many local and national bands, including The Dreamboys, The Cuban Heels, Stiff Little Fingers and The Rezillos. This attracted a young generation interested in music and art and these venues became the sites that forged creative and sustained relationships.



The Cloth was formed during the two years you all spent at the Royal College of Art (RCA). What drew all four of you together?

There were seven students studying Printed Textiles at the RCA in my year. We were a tightly formed group who worked and played hard. That group included myself and David Band, who also studied at GSA, along with Brian Bolger from Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Helen Manning from Middlesex Polytechnic. Collectively we formed The Cloth during our second year at the RCA. The four of us had so many shared interests relating to imagery, scale and ambition, but most importantly we were interested in establishing a studio in London that allowed us to engage in projects in both design and fine art. At that time David and I were designing record sleeves for a few Glasgow bands including Altered Images and The Bluebells and wanted to continue working in illustration and graphics. We were not interested in competing with one another and

we understood that working as a group would provide a strength and a support system, permitting the transition from student to working within a public and commercial environment.

In 2011, Lucy McKenzie and Beca Lipscombe of Atelier E.B, together with Panel, included The Cloth in both their 'Inventors of Tradition' exhibition and the accompanying publication, positioning The Cloth as a significant historical and cultural force within the narrative of 20th century Scottish textiles and fashion. Where did you place yourselves in the context of fashion during the 1980's, when the Cloth were active?

The Cloth had no training in fashion design. The textiles that we were producing at the RCA were very large-scale repeat patterns or single image cloths. At the outset of our thesis exhibition, in the early summer of 1983, we anticipated that our work would attract interest from interior designers and architects. It was a huge surprise that all interest sprung from the fashion industry. There was a thriving fashion movement emerging in London which we were witness to in club culture. Our large-scale, gestural prints were swiftly being commissioned by designers including Betty Jackson. This prompted us to think about starting our own label. This began as a small range of T-Shirts which was stocked by Paul Smith. Our collection grew along with demand. In order to manage this, we joined forces with Lynne Franks PR and Sales Division who also represented Katherine Hamnett, Body Map, Leigh Bowery and others. We found ourselves in good company and part of a thriving cultural context which defined London Fashion in the '80s. None of our production was located in Scotland but our collections were sold in stores in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Although we were located in London, The Cloth hosted multiple club nights in Glasgow to maintain a chronicle and a relationship with Scotland.

We also spotted that The Cloth designed the original interior for the Sub Club! Can you set the scene?!

The Cloth were invited by Graham Wilson, the Sub Club's owner at that time, to paint a mural but we did not design the interior. The mural was an abstract pattern of blocked colour with the trace of a linocut figurative composition projected on top and painted black. It was very dark in tone and the club was dimly lit, therefore the mural sunk gently into the wall. Brian, Helen and myself came to Glasgow to paint it. It was a privilege to work on this and seemed a fitting conclusion doing this in Glasgow as it was one of the last commissions The Cloth accepted.

There's an incredible editorial shoot that shows yourself and David Band illustrating garments onto a wall whilst a model poses in front of you, both of your gazes turned away from her. She is not wearing The Cloth garments. Was this symbolic of an alternative dialogue you were creating between body, fashion and surface?

This shoot was styled by Iain R. Webb and we followed his direction unquestioningly. At that time David and I were not considering any alternative dialogue and were not concerned by the fact that the models were not wearing garments by The Cloth. We were somewhat bemused by the invitation to make large scale fashion illustrations of garments by designers at the forefront of global fashion. The drawings were then to be installed in the window of Browns, a high-end fashion store in London. Browns became one of our main stockists in London and they commissioned an exclusive sweatshirt. The concept of our 'heads turned away' may signal The Cloth's decisive humorous take and attitude towards the fashion industry. We never really faced fashion full on, we always seemed to be turning away, looking elsewhere. We were slightly baffled and unsure of how we landed in that sphere and dubious of our belonging. The titles of our fashion collections such as 'Log and Loggerie' and 'Flock of Boots' were intentionally nonsensical and very tongue in cheek. This shoot was a bit like realising a weird fantasy and laughing at its reality. The Cloth did turn away from fashion during its concluding year focusing on developing a home furnishing collection.



You have donated a large amount of your printed work to GSA Archives and Collections. Can you tell us a bit about your experience of archiving your own work?

It is slightly surreal archiving your own work and seeing it through the lens of archivists, historians, research fellows and conservators, but it's a huge privilege and I feel so fortunate to be given this opportunity. It is a bit like working on a very large familiar jigsaw thinking you know where all the pieces belong but on closer scrutiny you don't. The experience is full of surprises. Images and objects are often loaded with emotional memories so at times it can be overwhelming. The most challenging aspect is trying to order the work chronologically. GSA Archives and Collections has my work from a ten-year period: 1977-1987. This was a very productive time often working on multiple projects at once. The work was produced quickly to meet the demands of looming deadlines and I have to dig deep to remember when the work was done, why it was made, and what was going on around me at that time. My memory often lets me down. The experience has been full of revelations and major in reminding me of an amazing time that was so splendid in so many ways. It has been very weighty viewing and examining work I made forty or so years ago and considering its relationship to my practice today.

Fraser Taylor studied Printed Textiles at The Glasgow School of Art and the Royal College of Art. He co-founded The Cloth, a creative studio focused on contemporary textile design and production. Since 1983 he has developed an interdisciplinary art practice and exhibited internationally, and his collaborative work includes projects with visual artists, designers, and contemporary dance. As an educator he has lectured at leading fine art and design institutions, and from 2001 until 2017 was a Visiting Artist and Adjunct Full Professor in the Department of Fiber and Material Studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. In 2017 he was awarded an Honorary Professorship from Glasgow School of Art and co-founded The Textile Collective. Taylor has recently been appointed Guest Curator at the Beacon Arts Centre in Greenock, Scotland.



Read DESign ONline's feature on Fraser Taylor and the archive

Follow The Cloth on Instagram

Download 'The Inventors of Tradition' catalogue, by Atelier E.B, edited by Panel, published by Koenig Books



Interview by Laura Richmond

With thanks to Atelier E.B, Helena Britt and Fraser Taylor

Images

1. *Summer 1986 advert by The Cloth. Courtesy of The Glasgow School of Art. The text in the advert says:
Photo Eamonn J McCabe. Hair & Make Up Sally Francome at V.Lonvo.
Model Mickey at Syncro. DC 089/3/4/3/4/9.*
2. *Log and Loggerie collection by The Cloth, Autumn/Winter 1985. Photographer: Andrew MacPherson. Stylist: Joe McKenna.
Courtesy of The Glasgow School of Art. DC 089/3/4/3/4/2*
3. *'Summer Simmits' for Summer 1985 by The Cloth. Courtesy of The Glasgow School of Art. Photographers: Anita Corbin & John O'Grady. Stylist: Iain R. Webb. Courtesy of Glasgow School of Art Archives & Collections, Textiles and Papers of Fraser Taylor, DC089/3/4/1/33.*
4. *Photo of Fraser Taylor for Blitz magazine editorial. 1985. Courtesy of The Glasgow School of Art. DC 089/3/4/3/3/3*
5. *The Cloth, for Liberty, window display. 1985. Courtesy of The Glasgow School of Art. DC 089/3/4/1/5.*
6. *T-shirts by The Cloth - David Band, Brian Bolger, Fraser Taylor and Helen Manning, Summer 1984. Courtesy of The Glasgow School of Art. Photograph by Nick Knight for Blitz magazine, words by Iain R. Webb, September 1984. DC089/3/4/2/7.*

Panel