



Marking the Way Home

by India Flint

Robert Frost famously wrote that “home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.” For me, home is where, when I take a walk, my feet know the way back without having to think about it.

For the four artists profiled in this article, home is the place that informs their practice as well as the place where their work is formed. They share a love of plants and the joy of gardening. All have, at one time or another, been my students. They all use the *ecoprint* technique that results in a natural design, created when plant parts, such as leaves, bark, or flowers, are bound with cloth or paper in the presence of heat and moisture. The work of each artist is clearly distinguished by its maker’s hand, as well as the bio-region that supplied the dye material. Remaining true to the “eco” principle that underpins the process, each avoids the addition of traditional synthesized mordants. Instead, they rely solely on the offerings of nature, supplemented only by metals found during their wanderings and water delivered through the kitchen tap.

Roz Hawker and I first met in New Zealand years ago when she was on her way back to Australia after a year’s absence. She had been living in an apartment in Salt Lake City, Utah—a dwelling and location very different from her home in Queensland. Accustomed to working in her garden and enjoying a generous living area designed with comfort and beauty in mind, Hawker found herself confined to a small and practically furnished concrete space. The closest approximation to a garden was a grassed communal area overlooked by all of the other residents. It was



FAR LEFT: Roz Hawker
Quiet Conversation Detail, silk,
eucalyptus dyes, shibori, hand stitching,
45" x 26", 2011.

CENTER: Heliconia flower and foxtail
palm seeds in **Roz Hawker's**
garden in Brisbane, Queensland,
Australia.

LEFT: Roz Hawker *Book for V*
Paper, silk, ecoprinting, natural dyes,
sterling silver, about 1.5" x 2" 2014.

here that Hawker discovered a new relationship with textiles. Having few materials with her, she bought a piece of cotton cloth and some reels of thread and began stitching. Lines and imagery from weekend excursions found their way into the work. Hawker also began to write, coming to the realization that this sparse way of living—far from all the familiar things (and responsibilities) of home—had a certain richness to it. In her eloquent poem *Finding Home*, she writes "what i have is internal space. what i have is freedom."

*Here i have found a still,
calm, grateful place.*

*And in this stillness and calm i have
found myself.*

In this meditation i have found myself.

And this is home.

It was here, too, that she began applying color to her work, beyond pre-dyed threads and cloth, using leftover tea bags to dye pieces that had already been stitched. My first impression of her textiles was that they could be read as hand-stitched songs, often with a visibly repeated chorus outlined by the strands and filaments threading their way back and forth across the cloth. She tells of how, as a child, she would watch her father (a magistrate) signing off on official documents. Later, she would emulate the gesture over and over again, making rhythmic and repetitive lines and swirls on a piece of paper.

Those marks she made years ago are still evident in her work. Though refined and polished with time, they are nonetheless eloquent, at once sophisticated and earthily primitive. They appear across her textile work and are echoed in her metal body adornments, for Hawker is also an accomplished silversmith. The two media meet in a series of small books where delicate



raw-edged pages of dyed paper and cloth are bound between exquisitely etched silver covers.

Hawker works almost exclusively with plant material gathered in her beautiful sub-tropical garden where fine-leaved eucalypts shade delicate gardenia, tall palms tower over bougainvillea, and the ubiquitous weeds of *bidens pilosa* (beggar ticks) and *murraya paniculata* (orange jasmine) reward diligent removal with brilliant gold and green dyes. In this fecund climate, the pruning required to keep the garden from engulfing the paths often makes its way to the compost heap via a dye pot.

A few thousand miles to the southwest of Australia, **Isobel**

McGarry places tiny stitches around the outlines of eucalyptus ecoprints. In the piece *10,000 leaves*, her thread traces in and around the dyed marks on a salvaged kimono; stitches run like a path through the forest, then

break into a cloud of tiny crosses. McGarry presently lives in the driest state on the driest continent, but her work is also strongly influenced by time spent living in Japan. She later discovered that her father was a member of the allied forces who occupied the country after the end of World War II, and developed a strong affinity for Japanese language and aesthetic. This vintage kimono, with its exquisite leaf prints and miniscule stitching, is at once prayer and poem, an object exemplifying peace and inviting long hours of quiet contemplation.

McGarry is concerned with the metaphorical mending of the tears and cuts in the fabric of life. Working with silk and cotton cloth or paper, always present



TOP LEFT: ISOBEL MCGARRY
10,000 leaves Vintage silk kimono,
ecoprinting, hand stitching, 2013.
Detail ABOVE.



LEFT: Borage in the shade of JUDY KEYLOCK's garden.
BELOW: JUDY KEYLOCK Moments Paper, plant dyes, 36" x 72", 2013.



is the running thread that binds humanity together, creating the possibility of tolerance and difference. Her narrative is of plants and the miracle of transformation. Some artists seek out guidance through directed post-graduate study; others negotiate a path of their own choosing. For the past seven years, McGarry has attended workshops taught by specialists whose techniques, aesthetics, or philosophies bring something new to her practice. She and Hawker both reflect the influence of Dorothy Caldwell's interpretation of kantha-style stitching, as well as sharing a concern for mending—not just cloth but also the human condition.

Across the Tasman sea from Australia, **Judy Keylock** lives and works in a peaceful valley not far from the city of Nelson on New Zealand's beautiful South Island. Hand-making paper from discarded cotton and linen clothing, she imbues it with color by dyeing with plants using pigments and stains from the earth, windfalls, and weeds from the local woodland. The rhythms and repeat patterns of nature, so often similar but never quite the same, also make an appearance in her work. Keylock loves what she calls "patterning the landscape song" through the contrast of light and shadow, often creating a surface from layers of translucent cloth to use as the substrate for stitching or dyeing.

In *moments*, she uses repeat paper elements made of recycled linen clothes dyed with *cotinus* (smoketree) leaves in the presence of iron fragments. Delicately pinned to a wall, it reminds one of moths in a museum collection. There is often subtle movement across the individual pages as they lift slightly with passing breezes. Viewing the whole from a distance, it seems to hint at a blurred



ABOVE: Summer spider webs, morning glories, and Jerusalem artichoke flowers in **BRECE HONEYCUTT**'s garden.

CENTER: **BRECE HONEYCUTT**
Fabriano/Delany

Ecoprinting, watercolor, silk and cotton on bundled hand-made Fabriano paper, 30" x 22", 2012. Collection of the Museo della Carta e della Filigrana, Fabriano, Italy.

Photo: Douglas Baz.

RIGHT: A bowl of fallen late summer morning glories, birch leaves, and coreopsis from **BRECE HONEYCUTT**'s garden.





pixelated image, the kind that draws attention to something or someone while actually trying to obscure their identity. There is an elusive element of sadness to this work.

Keylock's *flower frock* is embellished more directly with the actual plant parts. Local flora is sandwiched between fine cotton muslin, together with hand-cut and painted linen papers, gold leaf, seeds, flowers, and wire. The shadows of this ephemeral piece travel around the room with the path of the sun, dancing in response to passing air currents. There is an ethereal lightness to all of Keylock's work. The substrates are made from discarded clothing that has seen good service on the same land where the leaves and flowers that color it grew.

On the other side of the globe, American artist **Brece Honeycutt** is concerned with transforming things that are considered of little use—remnants, rags, cast-offs, weeds—into things of beauty and meaning. Invited to participate in the *2012 Fabriano Watercolor Biennial*, Honeycutt pondered the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson: "A weed is a plant whose virtues have not yet been discovered." Using paper supplied by Fabriano and specifically made for the event by master paper maker Luigi Macella, Honeycutt folded large sheets and processed them with weeds from her Massachusetts property. Further detail was added with watercolor and hand-stitching when the pieces were dry.

These exquisite pieces are as much a record of Honeycutt's environment as they are lyric odes to the plants whose memory is ingrained in the surface. They echo her daily journal entries, in which she notes the minutiae of the weather along with

plants and animals that make appearances on her property. In the tradition of a *hortus siccus*, her reflections, together with the work of the day, literally become arrangements of dried botanical delights.

All of these artists are connected by these seemingly simple themes: the process of metamorphosis in the dye pot, the linking with stitch, and the steeping in story.

A Note from the Author: There are those who use ecoprinting in their work but choose to also employ various metallic salts as mordant in order to brighten or alter color. In Australia, it is illegal to dispose of liquids containing copper sulphate or ferrous sulphate in the common drain. By law, they must be reduced by evaporation and presented at a disposal facility for hazardous materials. Yet, it is rare to meet dyers who comply. (Using ferrous sulphate carelessly can also lead to anemia.) Others have begun to introduce plastic film between the layers of cloth in bundles in order to make more precise prints. Adding such adjuncts reduces the process to an unsustainable practice, and so the very name ecoprint becomes ludicrous.



Roz Hawker www.rozhawker.blogspot.com
Brece Honeycutt www.brekehoneycutt.com

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