

In Their Own Words
Julia and Alex Caprara

New Series
ART OF AFRICA

Journey into the embroidery
of the sub-Saharan

MEET THE ARTISTS MAKING
THEIR OWN MARK

Emily Stewart

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in the textile. Haskell explains that her work attempts to 'explore the likeness of text and textile and investigate the mystery of encoded fabrics and the hidden language of weaving'. At times this encoding is quite literal such as the embedded rice paper messages that, alongside the language of weaving and the artist's private language of code, represent legible but concealed texts.

For many artists, especially in the United States, the events of September 11 2001 were a catalyst for the re-evaluation of their own artistic practice. In Haskell's case, her development of woven language shifted from a more personal record of events and concerns close to home to a broader investigation of the troubles facing the entire world. As she says, she aims 'to come to terms with the mysteries of my own life by creating diagrams, maps and woven metaphors'.

In contrast, American artist Linda Hutchins' use of text is very much a public affair. Several works using plastic barricade tape raise issues about our psychological regard for boundaries that, materially at least, are far from substantial.

Restricted Area, an installation of woven barricade tape for Portland International Airport, was conceived before the events of September 11 but on display in the fraught weeks of travel after the bombings. Inevitably the work took on new resonance during this time with heightened security measures at the forefront of many travellers' minds. Beyond these timely considerations, Hutchins' use of barricade tape addresses the disrupted and partial messages that language can convey, literally weaving together ideas that both heighten and disrupt the seeming clarity of communication.

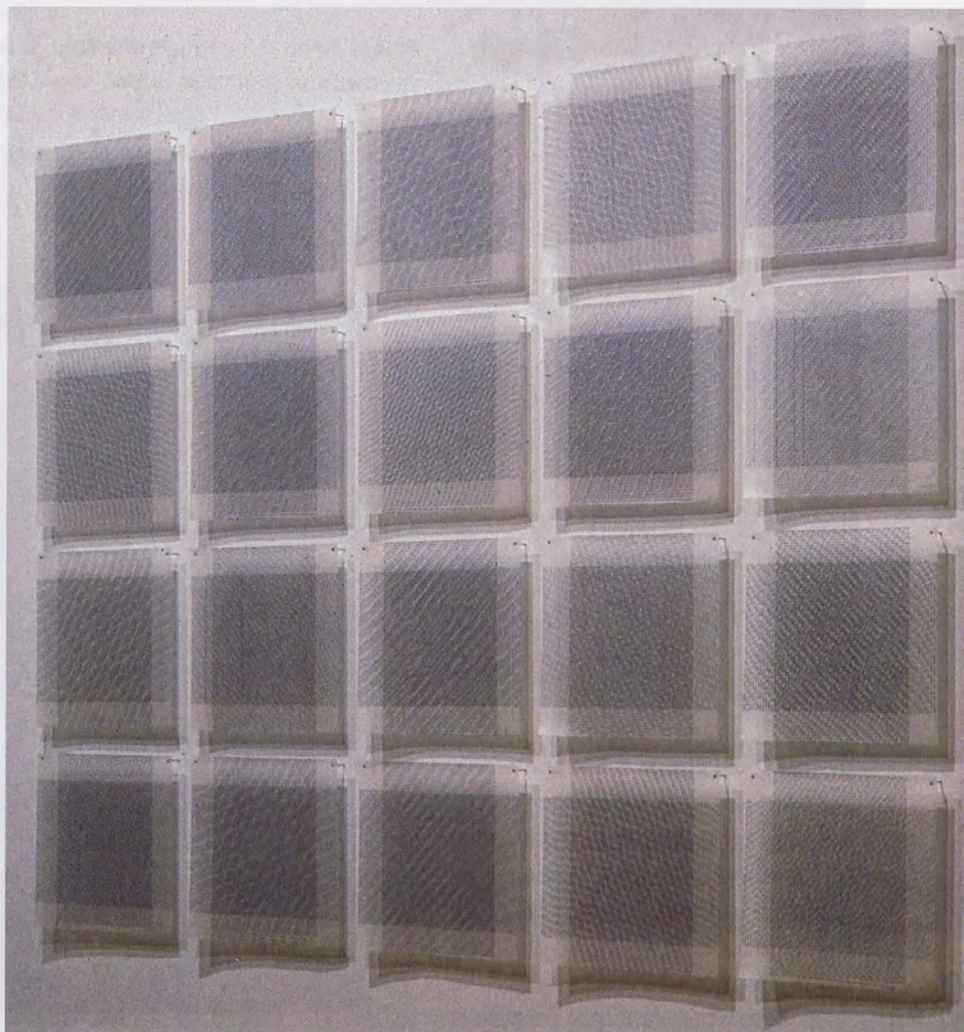
In contrast, the ephemeral is at the core of Hutchins' recent investigation of typewriter text on velum and tissue paper. As Terri Hopkins, director of The Art Gym where the work was



Above: Brigitte Amarger. *Les Mots Bleus*. 2003. Series of three. Plaques de metal, fils argent/blue, micro billes de verre reflechissantes, phosphorescent pigment (visible at night). 18 x 13cm

Below: Linda Hutchins. *Trousseau*. 2003. Typewriting on silk tissue. 135 x 170 x 4cm

Opposite: Sarah D Haskell. *A Question of Truth*. 2004. Woven linen, rayon, paper. 81 x 127cm



In reality, it is easy to read each of these artists' works as a diary of sorts. In some cases they capture the subconscious doodle that so often reveals more than we wish others to know

displayed in 2004 explains in her introduction to the exhibition catalogue, 'the letters of words typed over and over become "stitches", their patterns assuming the roles of warp and weft. Panels and squares of typed text hang like cloth, or are laid out like quilts on the wall'. Stitched samplers and quilted narratives have a long history of narrative content for textiles. Here, those historical roots are returned to their original and more common medium of paper, but they maintain textile references.

Hutchins' dialogue becomes one with pattern, an approach also taken up in the work of French textile artist Brigitte Amarger. Amarger takes her inspiration from literary tradition through her use of book and scroll-like formats. But here it is handwriting, rather than Hutchins' monotone type, that takes on a calligraphic role.

Amarger's use of phosphorescent paints also enhances the sense of line weight and texture and allows for portions of text to be read in the dark. This further step in the reading process allows the visible to become invisible and the invisible visible, conceivably unearthing darker – or lighter – narratives lurking beneath the obvious. The fact that the works are often designed to be viewed from front and back also heightens the idea of language as mark rather than concrete message, with mirrored words alluding to other partially concealed stories.

Of her work Amarger explains:



Above: Linda Hutchins. *Restricted Area*. 2001. Temporary mural, installation view at Portland International Airport, Portland, OR. Plastic barricade tape stapled and woven in place on the wall

Below: Sarah D Haskell. *Praise for the Senses*. 2004. Woven linen, rayon, pigments on cloth kozo paper. 41 x 41cm

Opposite: Brigitte Amarger. *Palimpseste: d'après les rayons et les ombres de Victor Hugo*. 2003. 210 x 180cm





'Some words, sentences or text can be read, others stay willingly unreadable, secrets or thoughts, layers of superimposed writing, day after day, like palimpsests of diaries.' In reality, it is easy to read each of these artists' works as a diary of sorts. In some

cases they capture the subconscious doodle that so often reveals more than we wish others to know. Often these details are then partially obscured through the layering of text as pattern, rather than legible message. In other cases, such as Hutchins' use of

barrier tape, the overt message must be understood as one of many – complex in material as well as linguistic purpose. In every case the available readings are multiple and shifting – ideal communication for today's rapidly changing world. ©