



WOVEN ART:
This page, clockwise from top left, *Faces*; *Kingfisher*; *At Night* inspired by the evening light on Bath stone around the city; Quinn the textile dog; the Kilve strata acoustic panels Gill made for the Hereford College of Art

Opposite, Gill Hewitt in her workshop with some of her most recent work



NEEDLES AND THREAD

Jessica Hope meets local textile artist Gill Hewitt who uses an unusual technique with a needle-punch machine to create intricately textured works of art

You'd be fooled into thinking that Gill Hewitt was an oil painter when admiring her artwork from afar. Her sweeping lines of dark hues and flashes of bright colours make it look as if she has simply swished her paintbrush along a canvas. However, upon closer inspection, you will find that these contrasting colours are in fact made of layers and layers of fibres and fabrics, all threaded together to make eye-catching pieces of work.

Gill, who is originally from Lancashire, achieves these intricate creations, similar to a tapestry but not woven, using a needle-punch machine that was designed especially for her style of work. The bed of 2,000 needles allows her to combine a collage of different coloured textures and layers into one piece of art. And adjusting the needles and the machine speed allows her to develop different effects in the patterns.

Despite working with needle-punch for more than a decade, Gill only began using it to make portraits and landscape-inspired artwork last summer. Her career began as a rug tufter in the 1990s, making rugs for the likes of British Rail headquarters and the Contemplation Centre in Rotterdam Hospital. Gill then trained at the Bath School of Art and Design, gaining a degree in Surface Design in 2005, before doing an MA where she planned to develop her ideas for her rug business further, but instead she became distracted by the school's needle-punch machine.

During her MA, Gill honed her artistic skills with the needle-punch by making acoustic panels that could be used to absorb sound while also illuminating a space with colour and pattern. Gill's panels won her an Innovation Award at Bath School of Art and Design in 2008, and she went on to develop this idea further after being commissioned by several businesses and colleges to help reduce the noise within buildings.

After producing these panels for more than a decade, Gill started to develop a new range of work last year by playing with smaller woven patterns to develop different shades of colour and texture, creating facial images and landscapes.

Gill hand dyes natural, transparent and translucent materials such as silk, cotton and wool, and also digitally prints fabrics using her own photographs.

By passing the material through the



needle-punch machine several times, she is able to build up layers of pattern, and as they aren't woven together like other textile work, she is able to pull back layers, remove them or move them around to begin new patterns. And she doesn't waste a single strand of material with her work – she keeps even the smallest of off-cuts so they can be re-used within more detailed pieces such as portraits.

Gill says that many of the ideas for her work come from the natural world around her. She cites St Ives in Cornwall, where she and her partner John enjoy spending time in their holiday cottage with their dog Quinn, as a great source of inspiration for her seascapes.

Having moved to Bath when she was 18, Gill enthuses about the warm glow of the sun on the Bath stone buildings, and the

evening light and shadows of Bath's Georgian buildings, both of which inspire her work.

These landscapes, abstracts and portraits have an intensity and depth that is akin to those of a rich oil painting. But no paintbrush is required to create these resonant needle-punch pieces. ■

Gill will be exhibiting her work at the Select Trail 2018 at Victoria Works Studios in Stroud during the weekends of 5-6 and 12-13 May; selecttrail.org

Gill's workshop on Morford Street, Bath is open to visitors upon appointment and she is available for commissioned work.

• gillhewitt.com