

XBD

Hope Duncan

The value we place on crafted items can be changed by elevating the functional aspects of an artwork. Echoes of the design ethos in my woven work can be found in weaving by the Bauhaus women weavers of the 1920s and '30s.

My work XBD consists of three formalist woven works and a tufted wool carpet. The series is a homage to the wool industry and comprises works which encourage the viewer to think about the importance of using renewable natural fibres in home furnishings, such as crossbred wool, a type of wool formerly used throughout the carpet industry.¹ Plastic synthetics, which have largely displaced natural wool in the carpet and furnishing industries as a cheaper alternative, make a product that is not long-lasting. These cheap, low-wearing carpets are also a major source of textile pollution in landfill and micro-fibre plastic pollution in waterways and the ocean.

Howard Risatti² discusses the value we place on crafted objects based on their purpose and suggests that one way of viewing purpose is through the utilitarianism of the object. A second way is to examine what the object is trying to do. I wanted to make a weaving which was evocative of a functional, traditional New Zealand textile found in every wool shed across the country, a fadge, and strip everything back to the essential textures and textile elements that would convey the essence of its 'fadgeness.'³

Why a fadge? In the New Zealand wool industry, wool is transported wholesale in large packages or bales. These come in standard sizes for ease of handling, known as a fadge. My works are woven snapshots of the journey of use over the lifespan of a fadge within the wool industry, from new to used – the point where the fadge is starting to disintegrate from puncture holes made by wool hooks and general abrasion from heavy wear and tear: — Some of the woven pieces in my panels had tufts of discarded and raw wool as random surface texture; this happens in wool bales which get pierced with use, resulting in the fleeces poking out.



Figure 1.



Figure 2.



Figures 3 and 4.

Golden Locks and the Three Fadges consists of three handwoven woolen fabrics. While the weaving mimics the fabric of wool-bale fadges, I made the works as hanging textile panels. To each one I added the exterior symbols which in the wool trade convey essential information about the value of each bale's contents on the label. Each of my fadges had a distinctive screen-printed silk label attached, and a scale replica of the stencil markings also found on wool-bale labels. The stencils explain where the wool came from – in this case Otago – and that it is crossbred wool. In the labels I used my name in place of the producer. The contents were 'backs' (from the back of a sheep fleece) and the classing was done by a Famer – 'F'. During the research for the project, I undertook wool-classing training to fully appreciate the wool cycle, from clip to carpet.

I drew inspiration from the women of the Bauhaus for my weaving. Colour, line and texture are the foremost design elements in the work of weavers Anni Albers, Gunta Stolzl, Gertrud Arndt and Otti Berger.⁴ These women led the way for women in textiles and were influential in the story of Bauhaus weaving. They produced textiles that were simple in structure and celebrated natural fibre in their designs. The panels I produced were minimalist and their neutral tones evoked their farm-gate heritage.

The fourth piece, *Careful Where You Tread!*, is a hand-tufted woolen rug. The colour composition was inspired by artist Alexandrake Kehayoglou,⁵ who tufts her native Argentine landscapes with irregular lengths of wool. My rug is hand-tufted using Axminster carpet wool. Axminster was an icon of the carpet industry before it went into liquidation due to substitution of synthetics for wool.⁶ However, wool is starting to make a come-back through fibre innovation,

as well as an appreciation for some of the unique qualities of New Zealand wool such as its whiteness and capacity to hold colour: "Genetically, our key crossbred breeds here (romney and perendale) have been bred over many generations to be free of coloured fibre, whereas most UK breeds contain black fibre, which cannot be dyed any other colour, and therefore stands out as a fault in the finished carpet."⁷



Figure 5.

Careful Where You Tread! sits on a plinth designed to elevate it from the floor and remove it from a state where it could be seen as a utilitarian object. The plinth is hand-carved from Expol underfloor insulation, which is made from polystyrene, another plastic used in the flooring industry and another reminder to consider what is under our floorings. According to Helen Edwards of the Australian-based Sustainable Home Hub,

There are so many things to consider and so many aspects of your home which can impact the environment. From the ground up, carpet and rugs have a huge impact and Cavalier Bremworth are a company who are aiming to lead the industry in reducing carpet's impact on the environment. Their wool carpet has a good head start using sustainable 100% New Zealand wool.⁸

Carpet manufacturers are starting to realise that their industry needs to have a sustainable focus and have rediscovered wool as a premium fibre for use in carpet manufacture, and with the capacity to be recycled in products such as carpet backing. Not only is wool a renewable resource, but its 'second life' use potentially removes tonnes of textile waste from landfill. And once it is past its use-by-date as fibre, it can be used as weed mat in gardens.

XBD set out to ask us to consider the value of wool in the home furnishings industry by elevating the status of the common wool bale. The humble fadge is used to transport wool from farm gate to sale house, and then to the factory. Fadges are used and reused over and over again in the service of the wool industry. XBD is a series of fine-art hand weavings, using a coarse wool fibre usually reserved for the floor; and a hand-made rug. The hand-tufted carpet is reminiscent of the heyday of Axminster carpets, the brand itself being well known for the high-quality carpets found in many households. A return to good-quality wool carpet flooring is necessary as we face a mountain of textile waste in the current flood of fast fashion flooring.

Hope Duncan is a contemporary fibre artist who uses natural fibres, mainly wools, in combination with traditional and experimental weaving, spinning and tufting techniques to create works that respond to social, environmental and national issues. Duncan creates pieces that require the viewer to look closer and spend time 'reading' her work and then begin conversations outside the works.

- 1 Paul Charman, "Low Financial Returns Have New Zealand's Crossbred Wool Industry in a Crisis," *NZ Herald*, 18 January 2018, https://www.nzherald.co.nz/business/news/article.cfm?c_id=3&objectid=11976852.
- 2 H Risatti, *A Theory Of Craft: Function and Aesthetic Expression* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1943).
- 3 The amount of wool that will fit into a large wool-bale bag or fadge typically weighs less than 100 kilograms.
- 4 U Muller, *Bauhaus Women: Art, Handicraft, Design* (Paris: Flammarion; London: Thames & Hudson, 1953).
- 5 *Alexandrate Kehayoglou: Biography*, <https://alexandrakehayoglou.com/Biography>.
- 6 Harry Wallop, "Pulling the Rug on Axminster carpets," *The Telegraph*, 21 February 2013, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/retailandconsumer/9885985/Pulling-the-rug-on-Axminster-carpets.html>.
- 7 Pat Deavoll, "New Zealand wool making the difference for innovative Danish carpet manufacturer," *Stuff*, 26 January 2019, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/farming/110098674/new-zealand-wool-making-the-difference-for-innovative-danish-carpet-manufacturer>.
- 8 Helen Edwards, "Flashbac recycled carpet backing a world first for Cavalier Bremworth," 11 February 2014, <https://www.sustainablehomehub.com/flashbac-recycled-carpet-backing-world-first-cavalier-bremworth/>.