



Introduction

Art and Design education in Manchester dates back to the 1830s, to a time when the relationship between industry, the museums and the schools was a very close one. During this early period of their existence the British Art Schools were largely industry funded. Employers needed a workforce that was trained and industry ready, and to help the schools they often donated machinery, materials or decorative objects through which students could seek inspiration and develop their making skills.

Manchester's wealth in the nineteenth century was generated largely by the textile industry. The textile legacy remains clearly visible today and can be seen in the architecture, the museums and the special collections of this University. We are fortunate to have prized collections containing outstanding examples of material from the arts and crafts period, artists' books of the 20th century, glass, decorated papers and much more.

Making skills remain as important today as they were in the nineteenth century and it is not surprising that we have extensive workshop facilities available for use by our students. Some of our facilities are unique in that they date back to the early part of the twentieth century. In addition, however, we can also boast state of the art digital technologies. We continue to work with our industrial contacts and often benefit from collaborative projects that result in the donation of equipment and software – working in the way that our predecessors did in the nineteenth century.

The Art School in Manchester has been offering specialist programmes in textiles for more than 160 years. We are a textiles and fashion centre that offers one of the few subject specific Embroidery degrees in the UK. Embroidery is a well resourced area with an equipment base that ranges from state of the art computerised industrial machines to archaic chain stitch Cornely machines.

The schiffli embroidery machine, built in Germany in the early 20th century, was purchased in the second half of the century and installed in the Cavendish building. It is unique, no other teaching institution possesses such a machine. It was originally built for the commercial mass production of embroidery on clothing or household textiles. It has little relevance to today's manufacturing processes so many would ask – why keep it?

The schiffli project has enabled us to show how the production process of a piece of machinery developed for mass production has been exploited by fifteen practitioners from a range of art and design disciplines. It shows how the machine has been used to push the boundaries of what is considered to be drawing. It reveals how links have been made between contemporary practice, historic traditions and industrial production. It has for all involved been an exciting project. It has encouraged and created opportunities for interdisciplinary enquiry and has developed approaches to Embroidery that will, hopefully, lead to understandings of the subject area as a creative tool rather than an overtly specialist and discreet activity.

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