

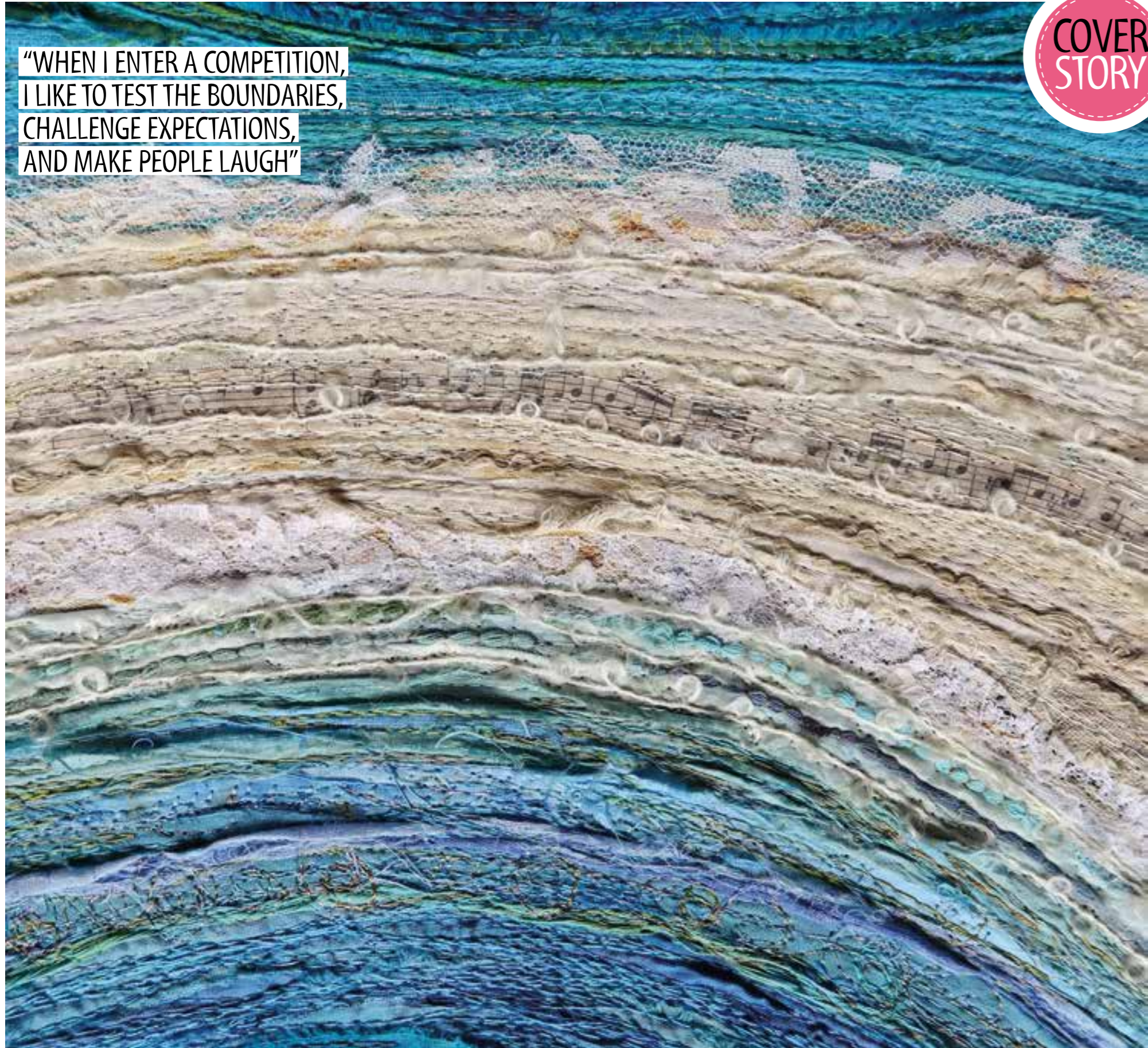


INTRICATE DETAIL

Isobel Moore looks at things from every angle and delivers the unexpected with detail and panache

“WHEN I ENTER A COMPETITION, I LIKE TO TEST THE BOUNDARIES, CHALLENGE EXPECTATIONS, AND MAKE PEOPLE LAUGH”

COVER STORY



I've felt the urge to create all my life, whether it was building Lego, attempting to knit or crochet (still can't do either!) or simply colouring and doodling. I first learnt to use a sewing machine at my grandmother's house. She had a fantastic little workroom halfway up the stairs; a tiny space crammed with fabric remnants and threads, and a cupboard with felt-tip pens and pencils. She would let me use anything and everything, and was always very encouraging.

My first sewing machine was an ancient black and gold Singer with an external motor attachment, which had once been my mother's. It lasted me until well after my college days, and I still have it, although it's been long superseded by my trusty Bernina.

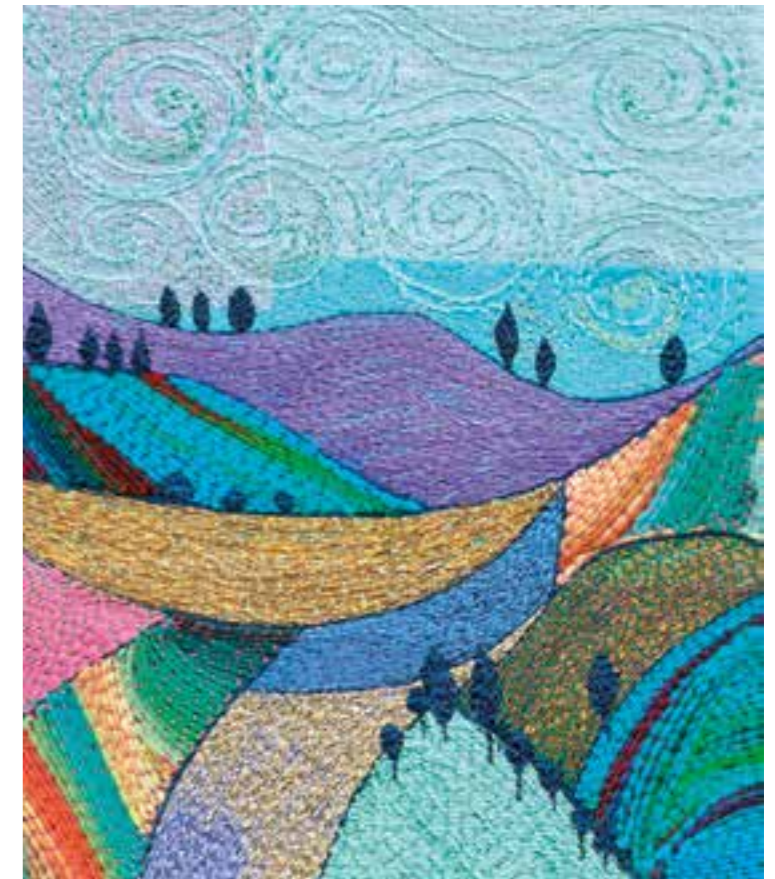
Despite my early obsession with sewing and creating, I don't remember making anything significant or particularly wonderful. I first used my sewing machine to tighten my jeans, or change skirts from knee-length A-line into straight miniskirts (I was a teenager)! When I was older, I made endless pairs of cotton trousers in jolly colours. I didn't do textiles or art at school or college, but followed my interest in plant science and studied horticulture instead. This led to a

residential volunteering placement with the charity Thrive, which prompted me to study for my PGCE and begin teaching in primary school.

Yet throughout this time, I still dabbled in all things textile. I taught myself silk-painting, among other things, and earned a bit of pocket money selling cards and mini appliqué wall-hangings. When I left teaching, I worked as a legal secretary, but I was secretly hoping to find a way to develop a new, long-term career for myself using my creativity.

With more time to devote to my own pursuits, I took a number of courses at my local Adult Education college. A beginners' felt-making class gave me a definite 'a-ha!' moment, but it was when I learnt the rudiments of machine embroidery that I realised I'd 'found my thing'. So, I took the bold step of leaving work and enrolled in a summer school at Missenden Abbey, where I took my first City & Guilds course with Pam Watts.

One thing led to another, and I continued studying with Pam at the Abbey for almost 10 years, eventually completing my City & Guilds Diploma. As I did so, the planets aligned and my local Adult Education College advertised for a machine embroidery tutor – so I dug out my PGCE certificate and applied! >>



Previous page:
My favourite seascape
Left:
Close up detail
Above: The Spring

Going straight from City & Guilds into teaching meant that it took me a while to discover my own style and way of working. I'm something of a magpie - for ideas and knowledge as well as fabric, threads and beads. I have books of scribbled notes and doodles, half-baked ideas and grand plans, plenty of resources and a brand new studio in which to work - but it usually takes a very short deadline and an element of competition to stir me into actually starting a piece!

When I enter a competition, I like to test the boundaries, challenge expectations, and also make people laugh. My first competition was with my local Embroiderers' Guild branch. The title was "Spring", so naturally, many entries featured embroidered daffodils and blossom. Not mine. After a long search on Freecycle, I found what I wanted - a suspension coil from a truck! I cleaned, primed and painted it, then wrapped it in about 50 metres of machine-embroidered cord. It didn't win, sadly, but my 'Spring' proved very popular, and I still use it as a demonstration piece.

The following year's competition, "Water", prompted the inevitable ponds, waterfalls and so on. My grand notion was to make a piece using a shower head, but unfortunately I couldn't find the right hardware. I ended up stitching a multitude of very fine beaded cords, each over a metre long and ending in a water-droplet shaped bead pendant, and suspending them from a wire ring.

My most recognised competition piece won the Tunbridge Wells Embroiderers' Guild President's Cup, under the title "Flotsam and Jetsam". It comprises two fish, stitched entirely on water-soluble fabric around copper wire armatures, with assorted recycled bits and pieces - broken jewellery, seashells, ring-pulls, washers and so on - stitched in place. Their tails are made from blue plastic freezer bags! They feature in Kim Thittichai's latest book "Recycled Textiles," and I was doubly thrilled when the publishers chose to use a detail shot for the cover.

Just as important in its own way was my entry for the National Embroiderers' Guild competition "Tree Rhythms". It didn't

win, but the work-in-progress pictures I posted on my Facebook page have been shared and liked all over the world. They also massively increased visitor numbers to my page and website - and ultimately to my being asked to write this!

The Tree Rhythms piece sparked my interest in stitching circular pieces on water-soluble fabric, using a lampshade ring as an armature. I made my purple circle in memory of our Embroiderers' Guild branch chairman, Fay Simmonds, whose favourite colour was purple. The design is based on Australian aboriginal imagery and features a central copper embellishment, since I was teaching that particular technique at the time. An article describing the making and inspiration appeared in the e-magazine 'threads.in-fusion', produced by Dale Rollerson in Australia.

They say what goes around comes around, and in 2015, I was back at Missenden Abbey Summer School - but this time as a tutor. Every year, we go camping in Brittany, and I love its unique combination of wildness, white sand, wide skies and the warmth of a French >>



Left: A green bowl made from wire (City & Guilds Diploma piece)





Left: Purple circular piece

Right: *The Tree Rhythms* circular piece



summer. This inspired my three-day Celtic Coastlines course, creating seascapes from a collaged paper background with added silks, cottons and scrim – all my favourite colours and textures!

I think my work will always oscillate between this natural, muted palette with texture and detail from recycled papers and unbleached scrim and linen, and something altogether brighter and bolder. I love all ethnic textiles, such as printed Indian cottons and silk, and I have a small but growing collection of traditional woven straps and ribbons; some bought on a long-ago visit to Canada, and others brought back by my mother from her more recent travels in Asia and South

America. I can't wait to see the traditional Sami costumes and embroidery on my upcoming trip to Norway!

This year is definitely one of new beginnings for me. We've recently converted our garage to create a studio space, so I finally have all my materials and inspiration in one place, not scattered all over the house. I'm also teaching further weekend courses in machine embroidery at Missenden Abbey, giving my inaugural talk to an Embroiderers' Guild branch (in Canterbury) and running my first privately-booked workshop - a two-day course for a textile group in Oxford, making the Flotsam and Jetsam fish. 