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**Narelle Jubelin at Goldsmiths College, London**

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**Abstract**

Catherine Harper reviews Narelle Jubelin’s Constance Howard Memorial Lecture at Goldsmiths College, University of London, November 2001. She discusses Jubelin’s deliberate and seductive use of the traditions of petit point embroidery in relation to her examination of colonialism, consumption, and identity. Textile means have been used by a range of female visual practitioners to examine, for example, women’s historical and contemporary oppression within the domestic or industrial economy; within specific cultures and geographies; within fashion; within medical practices; as well as to make contemporary pictorial and design representations of non- traditional subject matter.

Narelle Jubelin requires in her practice that we consider the construction of exclusive national identities, contemporary manifestations of historical colonialism, the politics of geographical exploration, systems of commerce, imperialism and global trade, and the relational exchanges of art and culture. And she makes these huge abstract issues unavoidable for us by rendering them small, intimate, engaging, and via the apparently innocuous craft of petit point embroidery. She makes us take heed of that which we may not wish to encounter, that which might make us uncomfortable, that which might implicate us in systems of desire and economy less savory than we might hope.



**Introduction**

In November 2001, Australian artist Narelle Jubelin gave the first Constance Howard Memorial Lecture at Goldsmiths College, University of London. Catherine Harper was there, and in this article, considers Jubelin’s approach to the development of her work both through deliberate and seductive use of the traditions of petit point embroidery[[1]](#footnote-1) and in relation to examination of colonialism, consumption, and identity.

Narelle Jubelin’s work first came to the attention of international audiences at the 1992 *Doubletake* exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, London. There, in a “subtle piece of sewing,” Jubelin laid down the strategies and territories she has continued to mobilize and inhabit.[[2]](#footnote-2) Her “fine sewings,” almost apologetic in their smallness, re- enact and re-consider the laying down of a colonial plan in Australia, and the establishment of its iconic monuments. Yet, stitched on plain- woven cloth is not the pretty or the decorative or the popular, but rather, in an innocuous form, a revolutionary politics of looking at locale—one’s neighborhood—as loaded and contested territory.

Jubelin is a *knowing* maker, self- conscious, highly politicized, able to use the very “this” of textiles to focus the eye and direct the mind. She *knows* that the time invested in the creation of such delicate and exquisite works *demands* reciprocal time from a viewer who must examine the work intimately to see its construction. She *knows* the emotive value of the painstaking labor apparent in her stitched pictures and how that meticulous working seduces and engages viewers, slowing them down, enabling them to begin to unravel the deeper meanings and connections embedded in her installations. Her early reticence to consider the implications of creating a sewn—rather than painted or photographic—image enriches her articulations now of the *power* of small stitches. She uses the seductive language of unpicking and unteasing, almost the language of undressing, in describing her intent, but recognizes the opportunity for forceful delivery of content, which she describes as “being slapped on the face.”

**Craft, Skill, Process**

Narelle Jubelin introduced her practice by plotting an oblique relationship with its unavoidable “textile-ness.” She wants us to know that she arrived at the practice of textiles, specifically petit point, via large-format, formalist painting rather than through textile tradition or training. Her choice of petit point, she explains, was “*ad hoc*”, initially an act of convenience, not driven by desire or commitment to that textile form. Indeed, it was the *portability* of the small-scale stitched pieces that in the first instance allowed her to make, in transit, what she primarily thought of as “little working drawings for large paintings.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Even currently, Jubelin intentionally overwhelms her delicate sewings with “inappropriately weighty” frames, installing them in sequences with other conceptually significant objects, rather than as skillfully crafted, delicately framed, singular items for examination and admiration. Close examination, she insists, would in any case reveal that her stitches are “incorrect,” changing direction at will in defiance of the technique’s convention.

Jubelin strategically places her work in self-constructed tension between the expediency of a critical visual art practice operating consciously, commercially and internationally, and the particularities, histories, and methodologies of a dedicated craft constituency. She is concerned to reference, and indeed value, the process, materials, and potency of meaning of the textile of her practice, but also to undermine on some level its very essential character: “How to get over the thing where people say Narelle Jubelin does petit point . . . what else does she do?”

In contriving a series of awkward oppositions between art and craft, concept and skill, in her introduction, Jubelin is unnecessarily embroiled in the specifics of well-versed arguments. Rather than immediately allowing those oppositions to run their course as conceptual pointers to hierarchies and differences key to her subject-matter, perhaps she dwells overlong on the dilemma of deeming “skilled stitcher” and “high art practitioner” to be mutually exclusive terms. Consequently, in remarking that she is “often viewed by textiles communities as a heretic,” Jubelin seems to indicate that this is how *she* would like to see *herself*.

The concept of heresy is in some way useful in critiques of contemporary cultural practice where rupture of social, political, religious, sexual taboos have been scrutinized.[[4]](#footnote-4) Arguably, there might also be a kind of notoriety, a romantic radicality, even glamour, associated with the concept of a “contemporary heretic,” and this is where it seems that Jubelin gets stuck in the introductory section of her presentation. Her practice is powerful, relevant, critical, and intelligent, but can she really be regarded as a “textile heretic?” She originated as a painter rather than a craftsperson; her use of petit point was initially expedient rather than committed; she frames and stages her stitchings a little differently to the way in which petit point is conventionally presented and viewed; and she breaks one of the conventions of the technique by occasionally reversing the direction of her stitches.

Yet there is a rich and acknowledged history of subversive and heretical practice within the history of textile making.[[5]](#footnote-5) But with so much high art and contemporary textile art already concerned with “heresy,”[[6]](#footnote-6) and with so many other artists already well established in the movement between high art and textiles,[[7]](#footnote-7) it seems to me that Jubelin’s desire to be a heretic within textile communities is of much less interest than the very real and pertinent other concerns her practice raises. She is, I believe, disingenuous in assuming that “conventional” practitioners of petit point or other stitching crafts will be universally critical of what she calls subversion and heresy. It seems to me that such practitioners are already most aware of how alteration of technique, diversity of skill, and unusual presentation have been used as tools in the development of critical and challenging textile work.

In the discourses surrounding “textile making,” much is made of the traditions and techniques of craft and the learning of skills, and indeed there is value in that.[[8]](#footnote-8) Pamela Johnson notes in her essay “Thinking Process” (2000) that the “reductive arguments around skill” that have dogged craft discourses can be essentially unhelpful, and urges that the ability to “do well that which is required” is possibly more key than long and worthy apprenticeship.[[9]](#footnote-9) Petit point in particular, though, has very specific formal conventions and particular genealogies. Jubelin, notably a formalist in origin, is aware of those orthodoxies and histories. Moreover, she is cognizant of the wider affective possibilities of placing her practice in subtle ways at variance with the received formalities of creating petit point in traditional fashion. Where Jubelin’s intimate breaks with orthodoxy become important is when they leave behind discourses specific to textile crafting, and shift the concern with interruption of the technique of petit point to consideration of what that interruption might *signify*.

The tiny tensions enacted by having miniscule stitches map a direction, then turn against their grain; the deliberate use of what in one formal register is “poor craft” with nonetheless the “twist” of superb finish; and the teasing and troubling of tradition, deliberately disrupts a system of direction, organization, convention. This in turn mirrors the *larger disruptions* staged in Jubelin’s wider practice. That is not to say that Jubelin’s reflection on “textile heresy” blinds her entirely to those *larger disruptions* resulting from her mobilization of textiles in work that has strong political and cultural resonance. On the contrary, she argues:

*part of the critique of the work that I make relies on the fact that textiles is a “lesser, lower” form . . . but for me that’s what activates the critique . . . that’s what gives the “click” into a possible politic or a possible critique . . . I can’t see how to mobilise it in other forms . . .*

The register of hierarchies that conventionally positions the painstaking embroidering of thread as “lesser” than formal application of paint is one of the orthodoxies that Jubelin both works with (in as much as she chooses to highlight her origin as a painter) and works against (in as much as she chooses to use petit point). She is sensitive to the cultural impulses that frame the “fussy stuff”—the “little labours of crafty making”—as “lower” than conceptual, cool, considered canvas and its contents. And she is sensitive to her own creative evolution: abandoning painting altogether in preference to stitch was a gradual process for this artist, only slowly developing as a consideration of “*what it meant* to make a sewn image rather than make a painted image” (my emphasis). The gradual appreciation of the meaning of that act is most significant to how this work is offered and received. Nevertheless, it seems to me that there remains a trace of Jubelin’s process of becoming aware of textile tropes and their potentialities. That trace then creates a particular friction (or *frisson*) in how Jubelin works with sewing, speaks about her practice, and identifies its cultural location.

Jubelin is highly aware of her own position as maker and exhibitor within the global network of consumption of visual culture. She articulates how powerful is the linkage with so-called “high” forms of creative production (painting, photography, literature). She also sees how textile discourses and practices provide compelling and influential contexts for her work. She operates a deliberately media- expansive rather than exclusive practice, moving in some ways against and in some ways with the very systems of trade, colonialism, class, and identity that she critiques. In terms of working with textiles, it seems important to Jubelin that we know she had a choice.

So there seems to be a dislocation, a variance, a friction, between general understanding of a craft/making discourse concerned with the “what” and the “how,” and Jubelin’s employment of a discourse at odds with a perceived formal and appropriate content for “art- making.” That Jubelin is in some way disruptive *and* disrupted, dislocated *and* dislocating, and at micro *and* macro levels, is interesting and, as I shall discuss later, relevant to her wider subject.

There are many types of textiles: petit point is particularly specialized. It favors the “compulsion to repeat,”[[10]](#footnote-10) and enacts what Pamela Johnson calls the “well-behaved” and “dutiful performance of process.”[[11]](#footnote-11) The carefully regulated pattern and form of petit point, and its certainty of outcome, is counter to “rebellious ‘crazy fields’ . . . transgressive breaches . . . Multiple peaks of fluid stitches, rhythmical passes of woven lines” of other more strenuous textile practices.[[12]](#footnote-12) It is neat, small-scale, ordered, orthodox, contained, even “prim,”[[13]](#footnote-13) most suited to being “implicit” rather than overt. Consequently, any “slap” is all the more potent. Jubelin’s choice to engage with this littlest of stitchings activates its potential for making radical work precisely because of its specific and minutely focused character.

Tantalizingly, Jubelin on occasion works with the peculiarities of gallery architecture, situating tiny work on a wall out of close reach, setting up frustration and desire in equal measure for the viewer. The labor, the eye-wateringly fine stitched thread, the delicate pictorial detail of photographic images is then subverted by a disavowal of the viewer’s gaze. Jubelin refuses the fundamental principle of exhibition (foremost, to reveal the work), and situates herself consciously as seductress, using her variety of skills, literally her “craft,” to capture her audience. She knows that, via “seduction and subversion”, she can insist that her viewer engages with the delicate materiality of her work, allowing her to cannily deliver more robust fare:

*petit point is one of the most sophisticated media that I can think of . . . there’s such a value in our culture for labour and for time expended towards making an image that I’m sure people are prepared to stop and linger longer . . .*

Here, again, the important value of petit point for Jubelin’s project is not its intrinsic textile value *per se* (detail, skill, requirement of dexterity and patience) or indeed its aesthetic value (finely drawn, graduated color, appealing surface, attractive imagery), but rather its affective value. That is, its value to her as a means towards an end.

That “lingering longer” is essential to Jubelin’s practice precisely because time is required for the viewer to digest and appreciate the complexities of work that successfully enacts “negotiation between crafting and conceptualising.”[[14]](#footnote-14) Territory is mapped out by Pamela Johnston as the place where stitch and thread become “malleable transmitter[s] of ideas,”[[15]](#footnote-15) literally inscribing text(ile) thought processes, political manifestos, radical and revolutionary visions into and onto plain woven cloth. This conception of a hybrid visual culture embracing textiles and the materials, processes and conventions of textile disciplines for the articulation of contemporary thinking is especially current.[[16]](#footnote-16) The radicality in Jubelin’s deliberate and seductive activation of the traditions of petit point embroidery therefore lies not in her corruption of certain conventions associated with that technique, but in her mobilization of those interventions in relation to her scrutiny of colonialism, consumption, and identity.

**Content, Concept, Subject**

Jubelin activates a critique, located in Australia, but pertinent beyond, of systems wherein indigenous people are marginalized and colonialist histories valorized. By consciously operating within the so- called “second-class” realms of textiles and craft, she insists on an examination of margins and centers, as well as our own assumptions and prejudices in respect of the *ad hoc*, the subversive, the radical, the orthodox.

Textile means have been used by a range of female visual practitioners to examine, for example, women’s historical and contemporary oppression within the domestic or industrial economy,[[17]](#footnote-17) within specific cultures and geographies,[[18]](#footnote-18) within fashion,[[19]](#footnote-19) within medical practices,[[20]](#footnote-20) as well as to make contemporary pictorial and design representations of non- traditional subject matter.[[21]](#footnote-21) Jubelin requires in her practice that we consider the construction of exclusive national identities, contemporary manifestations of historical colonialism, the politics of geographical exploration, systems of commerce, imperialism and global trade, and the relational exchanges of art and culture. And she makes these huge, abstract issues unavoidable for us by rendering them small, intimate, and engaging. She makes us take heed of that which we may not wish to encounter, that which might make us uncomfortable, that which might implicate us in systems of desire and economy less savory than we might hope.

Narelle Jubelin’s selection of imagery and her methodology is impeccable. She works from archival “photographs that constructed a national identity” for white Australia.[[22]](#footnote-22) In looking at these images of urban planning, decorative arts and architecture, images infused with the authority of imperialism “as subtle and as omnipresent” now as then, Jubelin connects with the historical and anthropological use of photography to “collect” people. The camera was (and arguably is) unmistakably a colonizing tool, a powerful divider between those looking and those being examined, those being scrutinized as exotic specimens and those being honored as masterful, dominant, powerful.

The photographic archives present Jubelin with the heroes, masters, and legends, the original cultural architects of modern Australia. Mawson, the heroic explorer racing Scott to the Antarctic, for example, typified the “heroic enterprise” of early colonists. These images of superiority, triumph, dominance, patriotism, are what became “the established.” They are photographically reproduced on contemporary bank notes and stamps, in colonial architecture and urban planning, in iconic monuments and valorizations of the Powerful and the Mighty. They are essentially and exclusively present as that order which is generally received.

There is a key moment of translation and shift between photograph and “the irony that’s brought through in the use of the petit point” in these tiny hand-sewn images of the heroic and iconic. The repetitive mundanity of stitched re- transcription of the cultural, documentary, anthropological authority of the photographic image renders Jubelin’s images much more discursive than their “camera-real” counterparts. Pictorially, petit point “holds” the image in a similar way to the freeze-frame of photography. But the subtle fuzz and luster of even the most tightly twisted thread are closer to the material matter of lived histories than the official glaze of the photographic surface. And the “fibre pixels” of the stitched surface create miniscule fragmentations that conversely dematerialize and interrupt the symbolism and formalism of their subjects. The textile materiality of the stitched image operates idiosyncratically to shift the photographic representation of concrete and immovable “historical and cultural truth” objectively presented.

Jubelin tells us that in 1986-8, white Australia was in preparation for the 1988 “celebration of the colonisation of Australia.” Aware of the “very contentious” nature of this moment in Australian cultural history, and cognizant of the possibility of her own repetition of the “colonising gaze” of history in her practice, Jubelin’s task was complex. She struggled, for example, with the ethics and taboos concerned with being a white woman at pains not to “represent” (or re-present) the location of aboriginal peoples as “primitive” or “other” within Australian contemporary culture, but rather as part of a particular constructed national identity.

To “celebrate” the colonization of Australia is to reinscribe that division. But to insist on its critique seems not only pertinent for now, but also urgent. Jubelin stitches the emblems, images, icons, heroes of colonial Australia. She sews the symbols of wider global practices of economic shift, migration, translation, exchange, and imbalance in a “lower rank” and “feminine” craft technique. By doing so, she subverts that technique’s genteel association with the European lady’s parlor; enacts it in minute scale, diminishes it in a weighty frame, and surely thus begins to unravel the certainty of “the heroic” of her subjects? *Here* might we see the heretic enacting that critique, rendered subversively, mischievously, ironically in tiny stitches with tiny thread on tiny fabric works?

The delicious delicacy of Jubelin’s stitched subversion is all the more underlined by her use of

frames that are traditionally too heavy or oppressive or dark for the fineness of petit point. That conceptual strategy—the placement of “something that’s viewed to be labor intensive, very delicate, very precious” within a frame (or architectural context) that overwhelms it—creates an unsettling tension and heightened sense of hierarchical distance between subject and *subject*. One’s eye gets drawn between stitch and surround; the mind is troubled by the question of which is the subject of the work, frame or sewing, and indeed which supports which?

In certain works, Jubelin makes replicas of the actual frames used for the most important images of Australian painting of the late nineteenth-century/early twentieth- century romantic tradition. Those historical and authentic frames, now museum-preserved, originate in the typical chip-carved frames created often by women in late- eighteenth-century Australia. They have their own traditions of making, decoration, and sampling, often overlooked, which draw them closer to Jubelin’s petit point sewings than is immediately understood. By creating these subtle and informed linkages, Jubelin complicates the installation, reading, and reception of the work by again destabilizing its focus, challenging that which is *marginal* and that which is *centered*.

She mobilizes just one of “the ways in which text and textiles are inextricably stitched together”[[23]](#footnote-23) in her attention to staging:

*I always work in installation . . . an accumulation of images . . . much like fragments or phrases within the structure of a sentence. . . I work like a writer . . . the semantic structure . . . punctuation . . . gaps . . . pauses . . . rhythm . . . parenthesis . . .*

Within the sentence structure of, for example, *Trade Delivers People*, exhibited first in 1990 at Aperto, Venice Biennial,[[24]](#footnote-24) the combination of objects and sewing “speaks” a complex narrative of difference, misfit, connection, contributing meaning, nuance, and pace like linguistic signs:

*a petit point self-portrait in silhouette framed in a copper Australian coin-decorated frame*

*an Ivory Coast mask decorated with coins of the British Empire*

*Venetian trading beads*

*a Dutch East India Company glass made of Venetian glass*

*a stitched work titled Our Bit of a New South Wales sewn milk-jug cover*

*a Dutch bride price armlet found in New Guinea*

*some tortoiseshell with a partially completed scrimshaw map of Australia and a representation of a European trading vessel[[25]](#footnote-25)*

That organizational strategy works against the convention of the singular iconic “work of art,” and indeed, the principle of a uniquely isolated “craft-object.” Complex relationships between objects create highly charged and highly complicated formal structures, which require interrogation and indeed self-evaluation within their rhythmic and repetitive syntax in order to fully, liberate the complex meanings in the work.

Repetition is apparent not only in the act of the faithfully reproduced stitch, one of thousands created by Jubelin’s busy needle, and in her repeated attention to virtuous detail. When we move back from the minutiae of her work and focus on the bigger picture of how certain

works are hung in relation to others, we see *greater* lines of reference in the collective works, and more *concentrated* delineations of power relations within other global hierarchies. Jubelin’s mapping between works constitutes a larger metaphorical embroidery, as ordered as the micro-works themselves.

*Trade Delivers People* (if read in left to right convention) opens with “I”. Jubelin places her self-portrait at the beginning of this installation indicating from the outset her role as an international visual artist in the “system of influence or trade or critique.” Rendered as a petit point in the “very low popularist representative form” of silhouette, she pointedly leaves her ethnic origin ambiguous. By situating herself self- consciously, self-critically at the very beginning of her own discourse, Jubelin implicates herself within the key critical debates of the last decade concerning the relationships between Europe, the West, and “indigenous cultures.”

Contemporary Australia occupies a particular position within those debates, being the product of colonialist occupation, with a vocal indigenous population,[[26]](#footnote-26) and a vociferous “one nation” contingent.[[27]](#footnote-27) By denying the audience opportunity to make assumptions about her investment in this work, by aligning herself with the “unlabelled,” and therefore the marginal, Jubelin nevertheless makes a powerful statement of intent. She will speak from the margins, but remain marginal. She will speak of relationships between people and culture, but remain even momentarily cultureless and “people-less.” She will discuss colonialism and be migratory.

The copper Australian coin- decorated frame of her ambiguous self-portrait, she tells us, was probably fashioned by returning Australian soldiers in rehabilitation (post-World War II, I believe). As with all of her work—stitched and otherwise—potential readings are complex. Since the silhouetted profile in the sewn work might be white Australian, but also might be Aboriginal Australian, or another non-white Australian, what might those potentially different relationships be to returning soldiers, to the concept of “return,” or indeed the idea of “soldier.” There is potential for the relationship to be harmonious, acrimonious or simply tense.[[28]](#footnote-28)

*that sense of raising doubt and maintaining a sense of being “unquiet,” that is one of the most important emotional responses that I try to build into work.*

One thing is sure, the sewn image is surrounded by the coinage of a colonized country, coinage that tacitly celebrates its white heroes, and is therefore “at the centre” rather than marginal. The center, however, has been relegated to the edge of the work, while the marginal or uncertain is literally framed as central . . . I think again of the heretic’s position at variance with what is generally received. I think of how “the centre cannot hold”[[29]](#footnote-29) if the scrutiny Jubelin initiates is realized. Yet, the center *does* hold. Jubelin’s interrogation of her subject matter, like the syntax of her sentencing, and the work of her needle, leans towards the neat and tidy.

The final image of *Trade Delivers People* is tortoiseshell with a partially completed scrimshaw[[30]](#footnote-30) map of Australia and the representation of a European trading vessel. Where the piece was originally shown, Venice and Canberra, the implications of these images were different. In one, Australia is peripheral, a destination; in the other, Australia is centered, home. For one viewer, Australia is either familiar or foreign, for another Australia is stolen. For one reading, Australia is complete, for another it is yet to be completed, for another it is under erosion. In one register, the trading vessel offers possibility, opportunity, and engagement; in another, it represents boredom, rootlessness, and weariness; in a third, it images plunder. The exchange, movement, transaction, and transition of colonial migration and trade are offered to the viewer as a conclusion in this final piece of work.[[31]](#footnote-31) There is almost a kind of resignation: the scrimshaw map (arguably the masculine-gendered craft equivalent of petit point) is incomplete, but does that signify open-ended conceptualism or exhaustion?

In between the silhouetted “I,” and the map/ship, Jubelin “does well that which is required.[[32]](#footnote-32) The Ivory Coast mask is decorated disease-like with coins of the British Empire, making a straight connection between *that* colonial relationship and the one implied between the silhouette and the soldier-soldered frame. Jubelin’s African mask speaks to its New York counterpart in the “most contested” exhibition *Primitivism in 20th- Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (1984).[[33]](#footnote-33) In that exhibition, Picasso’s work was famously juxtaposed within an unattributed African mask. The subsequent controversy and discussion of Picasso’s use of African masks as influence and inspiration, was of great significance to the staging of *this* installation of Jubelin’s work. In New York, Jubelin contends, the discourse was devoid of ethics, effectively decontextualizing and disenfranchising that African mask for use in a Western culture discourse. This, she argues, is as much symptomatic of a colonialist disposition as physical invasion and plunder of territory. It speaks strongly of ingrained systems of dominance, superiority, and value.

By making that explicit reference, Jubelin plugs her discourse of colonialist exchange into that of the international systems of “art commerce.” Jubelin’s use of Venetian trading beads, traded singly in Africa, assembled, then sold back in Venice at high prices, seems apt here:

*the trade beads are like those bargaining objects that are always used within the process of colonisation when there’s not a currency . . . The bargaining of small objects . . . [that] . . . then . . . work back in terms of the routes of trade, the routes of cycles, the routes of influence, coming back and being sold in luxurious shops within Venice as a tourist capital . . .*

Jubelin’s concern here, placed within the context of self- portraiture, craft making, art making, and colonization, is the “tourist trade” and the “trade in visual culture,” both of which have the potential for trafficking of decontextualized objects and ideas. The Dutch bride price armlet found in New Guinea (violently colonized and repressed under Australian rule) represents another displaced and decontextualized object (this time in the other direction). That reversal of direction is significant: Jubelin does not seek to make simple value judgments naming trading nations and historic colonialism as merely “bad.” Her critique is much more sustained, complex, and self-evaluative. Again, she implicates herself, highlighting her own precarious position as white woman advocate of the indigenous, the crafted, and the complex, and white woman artist with her own international practice and trade of/in visual culture.

Here, I maintain, Jubelin begins to move into the affectively and effectively radical territories that

importantly align her with heresy more than the usage of petit point extra to the purely decorative, charming, and genteel. The question is raised as to whether Jubelin’s ambivalences in respect of craft tradition, historical embroidery, skill specificity, “textile making,” petit point conventions, orthodoxies of “doing” noted earlier, place her as much in the role of plunderer as the colonialist and the decontextualizing curator? Moreover, she inhabits the privileged space of international postmodern culture where travel, exchange, influence, and inspiration are seamless and potentially only as conceptually or ethically problematic as one wishes to make them.

How her work is read is, of course, always at stake. For example, in *Trade Delivers People*, the blue and white sewing of *Our Bit[[34]](#footnote-34)* sets up an important connection with the one blue eye and one white eye of the Ivory Coast mask. The colonized and colonist of two distinct global zones are linked, but how? Jubelin acknowledges the problematics of those kinds of reading receiving only “a very simple formalist analysis,” but insists the risk is worthwhile:

*one of the most interesting and riveting commentaries that was given to me was by a man who said as he was going along this work trying to read and understand why I was setting up the juxtapositions I was setting up . . . he said he caught himself in the moment of “the colonising gaze” . . . the relationship between the high modernism of the mask and Picasso. . .*

This, for me is where Jubelin’s work makes the subtle shift into great complexity. Here, she implicates the *viewer* in her webs of international trade, imperialism, colonialism, exchange, as well as positioning *herself* within those systems. For is it at all possible to be outside the global systems she describes?

1. Petit point is a small diagonal unidirectional needlepoint stitch also known as tent stitch and worked on single canvas with cotton thread, silk or split wool ([www.jeanmcintosh.com/needlework.html](http://www.jeanmcintosh.com/needlework.html)). Pattern and design cards for this stitch technique date back to the sixteenth century, but its heyday was in the first half of the nineteenth century, particularly in Austria. Traditional Austrian designs were characterized by strongly contrasting and brilliantly colored flower motifs, images of temples, ruins and pyramids, pairs of doves, etc. Petit point is a technique

requiring skill, and was practiced traditionally by both professional needlewomen and ladies of the aristocracy ([www.needlepoint.com/cs/miniature/index\_2.htm](http://www.needlepoint.com/cs/miniature/index_2.htm)). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Unless otherwise attributed, all quoted text in this article is taken directly from my transcript of Narelle Jubelin’s presentation at Goldsmiths’ College, University of London, November 17 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Jubelin refers several times in her address to the fact that her work is seen in commercial and public spaces concerned particularly with *art* rather than *craft* practice, spaces that mobilize the “system of painters” rather than the “discourses of craft.” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *De heretico comburendo*, 1401 Act of the English Parliament, determined that heretics should be burnt to death for their “variance with . . . [that which is] . . . generally received, I think here also, for example, of *Heresies*, the classic feminist periodical on art and politics published in New York by the Heresies Collective from the 1970s to the 1990s. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See, for example, Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: The Women’s Press, 1984); in 1970s West Coast US and British feminist visual culture; UK suffrage banners from the early nineteenth century; and the AIDS Memorial Quilt ongoing since 1987.  [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. I think of the perceived intent of the Sensation exhibition of selected works from the Saatchi Collection of Young British Art at the Royal Academy, London, 1997.  [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. I think here of the Loose Threads exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery, London, 1998.  [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Simon Watney, Crafty Craft (Exhibition Catalogue) (London and Kettle’s Yard, Cambridge: Richard Salmon, 1997-8, p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Pamela Johnson “Thinking Process” in *Art Textiles2* (Bury St. Edmunds: Art Gallery of Bury St. Edmunds, 2000), pp. 17–24, 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Sigmund Freud “The Uncanny” (1919) in *The Complete Psychological Works* Vol. 17 (London: Howarth Press, 1955), p. 238, referencing also Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920).  [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Pamela Johnson “Thinking Process,” p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Janis Jefferies, “Text and textiles: weaving across the borderlines” in *New Feminist Art Criticism: Critical Strategies*, ed. Katy Deepwell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 164–73, 166, referencing Nancy K. Miller, “Arachnologies: The Woman, The Text and the Critic” in *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 77–80.  [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Janis Jefferies, “Text and Textiles,” p. 167.  [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Pamela Johnson “Thinking Process,” p. 19.  [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Pamela Johnson, “Thinking Process,” p. 19.  [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See, for example, *Context: A One Day Symposium Organized by the North West Textile Forum* (Chester: College of Higher Education, UK, 2001).  [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. For example, Liza Lou, *Kitchen* (1995), beaded installation, Akron Museum of Art, Ohio, March 2000.  [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. For example, Kim Soo-Ja, *Sewing into Walking—Homage to their Sacrifice*, used clothing, bedcovers, speaker, *Imagine* by John Lennon, installation at Jungwae Park, Kwangju, Korea, 1995.  [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. For example, Vanessa Beecroft, *VB40*, performance, 12th Sydney Biennale, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, May–July 2000. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. For example, Catherine Harper, *Anatomical Drag*, mixed media performance, installation, objects, video, Orchard Gallery, Derry, 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. For example, Anna Hunt, *Guggenheim, Bilbao* (1998), thread on canvas, British Art Show, 2000.   [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. These images include the centennial tree where South Australia was proclaimed a colony of the British Empire; one of the border markers to map out the territory of Australia; an image of one of the original documentary photographers working with Aboriginal people; the Australian South Pole explorer Mawson (1882–1958); the Sydney and Adelaide colonial town plans; a Sydney lighthouse built by one of  the colonial architects who was also a forger; the first Australian coin, the “holey dollar” (a Spanish coin from which the English took the middle to make two coins); the Sydney fountain with the silhouette of Queen Victoria in the base; and notes by a colonialist surgeon in Australia describing the, as then, unnamed place. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Janis Jefferies, “Text and textiles,” p. 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. The contents and order of this installation are listed on p. x of this article. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Narelle Jubelin, *Trade Delivers People* (1990), mixed media, Aperto, Venice Biennial, 1990. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. [www.reconciliation.org.au](http://www.reconciliation.org.au) [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. [www.onenation.com.au/about.html](http://www.onenation.com.au/about.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. As with the stitched work in this installation, the soldier’s frame carried a discernable trace of nostalgia. The small-town collections of “frontier-spirit,” home-spun objects that celebrate the hardship experienced by working-class immigrants to the “new land” cannot be overlooked entirely, and complexify Jubelin’s position further in terms of issues of class, allegiance, criticism, and social historical accuracy. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. W. B. Yeats, *The Second Coming* (1921). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. *Scrimshaw* (n.), general name for the handiwork of sailors during long voyages; carvings on bone, shells, ivory, etc. *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (London: Guild Publishing, 1983), p. 1913. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. The Dutch East India Company, also represented by a Venetian glass in this piece of work, was founded in 1602 and is still operating now. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Pamela Johnson, “Thinking Process,” p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Museum of Modern Art, New York. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. *Our Bit* is a sewing of a milk-jug cover to keep flies out of the milk from a collection of women’s memorabilia in New South Wales. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)