

Narrative Textiles

TELL YOUR
STORY IN
MIXED MEDIA
AND STITCH



Ailish Henderson

The 'S' word (sketchbooks)

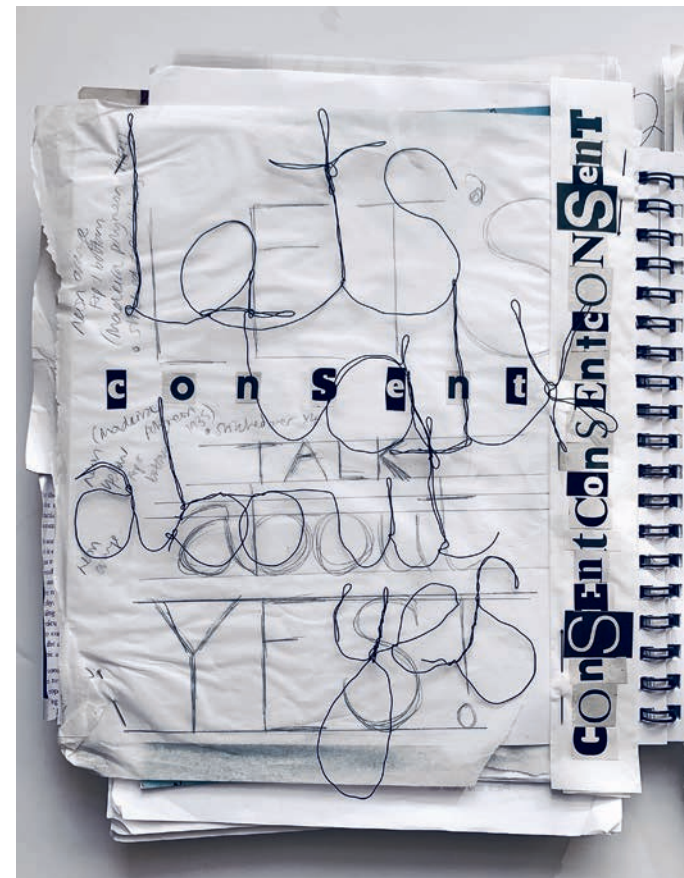
Many people struggle with sketchbooks. Why? Maybe it is the formality of them, or maybe it is the idea of spoiling a clean book, derived from early childhood.

We don't want to make a mistake, do we? So, we never start. And therein lies the problem: FEAR.

RIGHT: Detail of colour sketchbook page (Ailish Henderson, 2018).

OPPOSITE, ABOVE: Let's Talk About Yes (Julia Triston, 2020). Created for the Textile Study Group's Insights project.

OPPOSITE, BELOW: Sketchbook, research and initial ideas page for further development (Mandy Pattullo, 2022).



Remember what the definition of a sketchbook is:

- 'A book of sheets of paper for drawing on' *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*
- A few words are all it takes to define a whole balloon of fear in our minds – so let's pop it! Just lose the 'S' word and call it something else.
- As a visual artist, I tend to use a sketchbook as a diary; it is my way of making sense of whatever I am processing in my head.
- Take the childlike approach – a book of pages is simply a playground of possibilities. My own sketchbooks contain to-do lists, diagrams, notes I don't want to forget, paintings, pressed flowers, more final thoughts, and even some stitching if the paper allows! Maybe 'scrapbook' would be a better word?



Try these ideas:

One: Take any loose pages you find and use them one at a time. Then put the pages in one pile.

Two: Stitch or link pages together. There are plenty of 'how-to' guides available on this, or you may have your own ideas.

Three: Give yourself a working theme: Colour; Trees; and Shape and Line are just a few I have covered.



Why we keep sketchbooks:

- To remind us of a place we have visited.
- To remember an art or textiles exhibition that we found inspirational.
- A memory aid, for future use. (Many of my ideas stay in my sketchbook, in written or quick doodle form. Sometimes they are let out to play.)
- A visual and written diary.
- A 'story' that leads us through ideas that we may have on the journey to making a finished piece.



Here are a few things that keeping a visual diary can do for us:

1. They help us explore ideas and sort out thoughts without too much time being wasted.
2. They offer insights about what is going on in our heads.
3. They help us reflect on our ideas without forgetting them. We are then better able to decide if we want to continue with a certain idea.
4. They make our thoughts real. Even if they only stay in our sketchbooks, we have them in store.
5. They encourage deeper thinking on our theme or topic.
6. They promote self-directed learning, rather than waiting for someone else to teach us.
7. They help us focus.
8. They inspire confidence to either make more sketchbooks, or make something else.

THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE: Basic sketchbook tools.



What tools do I need?

- The sketchbook (in whatever form we create it).
- Biro pen, ink pen, pencils.
- Any photos, cuttings or personal paper-based information that we want to stick in; 'scrapbook' material.
- Glue stick (invaluable).
- Paintbrush (if desired).
- Any little embroideries, samples or other textile-related pieces that are small enough to fit inside the sketchbook.