

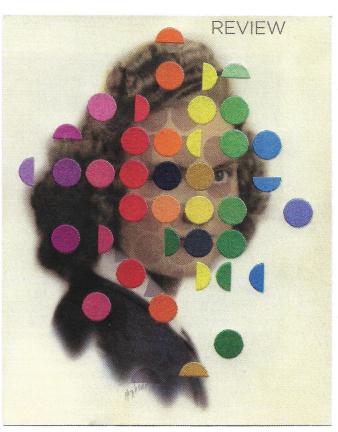




Clockwise from bottom left: Julie Cockburn, Blue Face Man, 2019. Enamel on found photograph. The Welder, 2019. Hand embroidery on found photograph.

Feed the Birds Woman, 2019. C-type print of found photograph, glass beads. Qualm, 2019. Hand embroidery and

inkjet on found photograph.



Julie Cockburn Telling it Slant

Flowers Gallery, London 12 September—2 November 2019

ONE DOESN'T OFTEN FIND oneself in a fine art gallery looking at embroidery. Widely considered a craft, rather than an art, embroidery doesn't often get the chance to breathe in large, airy spaces. Most especially not in London, which is, these days, nearly devoid of proper craft galleries where you don't trip up over work the minute you step into the space. And whilst it is always good to have craft on show anywhere, visiting the Flowers gallery on Kingsland Road – most unapologetically an art gallery – to see Julie Cockburn's work brought home to me just how much Julie's work benefited from a serious, spacious hang in a serious space.

Cockburn took a BA Fine Art (Sculpture) at Central St Martins in the early 1990s. She had her first solo exhibition at Flowers in 2010 and the exhibition there: Telling It Slant, was her biggest solo exhibition to date. It was a serious (and beautiful) hang of fascinating work, showing Julie's considered, exquisitely finished works so well. The space at Flowers is generous; with nice, friendly low ceilings and a strong (literally and aesthetically) polished concrete floor. The staff were welcoming and the work just immediately drew me inwards, hung singly and in groups, against predominantly white walls broken up with some few large, vibrant colour blocks (echoing colours in the works). Some glass 'buttons' (designed by Julie, made by Langham Glass) pooling on the floor, broke up flat surfaces. And her works were all framed in coloured frames that echoed colours in the work, too.

Cockburn works with found images - old photographic

'foundlings' as she calls them. She over-works these images with print, embroidery and threads until they are 'transformed from silent, redundant orphans into material objects with a regenerated heartbeat'.

There were black and white images of cherry trees with tiny pink blossoms embroidered over them (Beauty, Truth and Truth, Beauty). Portraits of people in sober 1940s black and white, overlaid with brightly embroidered dots that concealed (and revealed) the sitter's features behind a textile curtain (Dapple (Rainbow Woman I). And families, aligned behind embroidered concentric circles, in Family Circle and, in Clan — behind squares within squares. Julie also worked with a specialist screen printing studio (called The Print Block) to overlay subtle, shaped 'masks' of colour onto portraits, as in It's Complicated 8.

The title of this exhibition 'Telling It Slant' comes from an Emily Dickinson poem, *Tell all the Truth but Tell it Slant.* This, the names of Julie's works and the name of her new book, *Stickybeak*, all suggest an artist who uses words as circumspectly as she does thread and print — with restrained humour and cleverness. Nothing is overdone, and all the hand embroidery here was immaculate. Cockburn undoubtedly adds to her found imagery, never taking away from it. Her love of her vintage subjects is embellished literally and figuratively through the artist's hand and eye, creating new lives for them.

'Telling It Slant' was a super show by a super artist with a super book to accompany it. I have nothing cleverer to say than that. JANE AUDAS

flowersgallery.com