

Foreword

Their auto/biography on cloth not paper...

While I was writing *Walking The Block* I came to realise that a sequel was inevitable, *Spine* wades deeper, sinks further into the lives, work and practices; the stories of the development of the makers, dyers and handblock printers, Phyllis Barron and Dorothy Larcher.

Spine encounters borders, both real and imaginary; circling and cross-hatching their separate war experiences. Phyllis Barron served as a VAD during the First World War and her future partner, Dorothy Larcher, found herself stranded in India until after the war. *Spine* asks questions about how their direct and indirect experiences germinated within the borders of their different conscious and unconscious realities, seeping through the dye colours of their printed stuffs, clambering in Dorothy's designs, or thrashing in Phyllis's.

I wanted to explore each 'vertebra' that came to support the whole body of their printed 'stuffs'; this is what they called their printed designs. I wanted to see what they were made of, so to speak, what lay between the discs, throbbled through the nerves, flexed the sinews. Phyllis had direct experience of the wounded, the mind and the body, the soul and the soulfulness of the battlefield; this stands in stark contrast to Dorothy's experience, which on the face of it, appears to be untouched, unscathed, almost 19th Century, so immersed was she in the ancient and traditional dye practices and print techniques of India.

Yet, we know she was aware of the haemorrhage of traditional Indian handicrafts and the fierce arguments that raged about the dissolution and integration of Indian Art and Crafts into modern Western art.

I wanted to explore how the two women interacted or overprinted each other when they eventually formed a partnership; how they found common ground, amidst their difference, how they found ways to converse through pattern and colour, to create a sense of unity and harmony.

I turned their pockets inside out, so to speak, excavating turn-ups, hems, folds and seams, the patch pockets of their lives. As I wrote I found that things could never be forced open. Sometimes events and circumstances got stuck or I had to vary the pace or back off. I trusted my gut instinct so a line wouldn't get broken, at other times I let a passage fall or waste away, sometimes I let it bloom or bolt.

After a time, patches became clearer, or as Blake described it 'the bounding line' would come into view with all its inflections and movements, and I could continue.

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The True Method of knowledge is experiment

William Blake: All Religions are One (1788)

How do we distinguish one from another, but by the bounding line and its infinite inflections and movements?

William Blake: The Bounding Line