

ONLINE TALK: LINEN

Event description

Linen, made from the flax plant, has a history that extends into antiquity. Mummies wrapped in linen shrouds have been discovered in Egyptian tombs dated from more than 5,000 years ago. The Bible references this fibre and its cloth as a noble and valuable product, and linen production is depicted in wall drawings from 2,000 years ago. A strong and durable cloth, linen has been used in a multitude of ways— from clothing and furnishings to canvases, lace and ropes. More recently, the quality of linen has been used for insulation and the automotive industry. Although easily creased, linen's silky surface matures as it is worn. Few other fabrics improve with time, meaning that linen can be reused, revived and reworked, as it often was throughout history.

This evening's talk on linen brings together linen producers, antique linen dealers, curators and linen experts to tell the story of linen and the future of flax as an environmentally and sustainable fibre.

Speakers include; John Ennis of [Our Linen Stories](#), [Su Mason](#), [Flaxland](#), [European Confederation of Flax & Hemp](#) and [The Linen Project](#).

List of speakers:

Gill Gledhill of European Confederation of Flax & Hemp

Since studying woven textile design at Chelsea College of Art and Central St Martins, Gill has been fascinated by how and from what we make the textiles with which we surround ourselves – and their impact on our health and wellbeing. As a journalist, Gill reported on the fashion, jewellery and luxury goods industries and established the communications agency GGHQ Fashion Intelligence in 2003 who are connectors and advisers to the fashion and textiles markets. They have become the strategic partners of the European Confederation of Flax & Hemp in the UK, which is the organisation that supports the European linen industry – it's a beautiful, low-impact plant-based fabric that's locally produced.

The European Confederation of Flax & Hemp, CELC

[CELC](#) is the federating authority for the Linen sector globally, Western Europe is the world's leading producer of Flax fibre: France, Belgium and the Netherlands account for 80% of production. The only European agro-industrial organisation to bring together and federate all stages of flax and hemp production – 10,000 companies in 14 European countries – CELC leads a sector of excellence in a globalised context. A mission based on the innovative and environmental qualities of its fibres, guaranteed by the European Flax® and Masters of Linen® traceability marks and promoted to professionals and consumers through a promotional campaign.

The Linen Project

The Linen Project is a hands-on practice-based research environment initiated by the ArtEZ MFA Practice Held in Common and the Crafts Council Nederland.

The Linen Project investigates and works towards reactivating the economic viability of small-scale local flax cultivation and linen production in the Netherlands. The Linen Project's learning by doing approach to all stages of flax and linen production allows for meaningful and embodied ways of being and learning for all partners involved. The Linen Project is committed to identifying, evolving and strengthening socio-economic patterns and behaviours that are rooted in a commoning approach. The project's activities facilitate interactions based on participation, reciprocity and mutuality.

The inherent connections between (cultural) heritage, education, agriculture, design, crafts, and the economy, are activated within the context of The Linen Project. A growing awareness of this interdependence sets the exchange of diverse knowledge, skills and competencies in motion, generating new insights for all involved and for the evolution of the project itself.

The Linen Project's current activities include the cultivation and production of organic flax and linen in the Gelderland region, the Netherlands, the Shared Stewardship initiative, the development of a small scale flax spinning facility, and the creation of an open-source knowledge base.

Description of talk:

This talk will introduce the current projects underway at The Linen Project, and will be a discussion of the variety of activities that have taken place over last three years of the project.

Flaxland

In 2007 Simon and Ann Cooper started to grow flax for fibre on the farms at which Simon worked and the following year setting up their websites "flaxland" to promote, educate and encourage others to produce home grown plant fibres.

Having a lifelong interest in traditional wooden boats, the combination of timbers and plant fibres could provide the sails, ropes, fishing nets and natural clothing meant there was potential to grow all the raw materials to make small non powered boats, particularly fabric covered boats such as canoes, currachs and coracles.

With the absence of any linen processing or spinning industry in the UK they developed cottage industry style tools to work the fibres; learned to ret the straw and spin flax. Their latest project is to investigate the potential of the short linseed straw which is currently a waste product in UK agriculture, to blend

with wool to be spun and produced on a local scale but industrially. This, they believe, could be the first step in producing a commercially viable fabric particularly in countries like the UK which have no facilities for processing/spinning long fibres.

Description of talk:

Flaxland will discuss the work reviving the production of handmade linen in the UK, the value of community and social values of growing flax. Methods of hand processing of flax, spinning, making home grown flax sliver. Re-establishing a flax industry, new uses of the flax in composites and the potential of linseed straw.

Dr John Ennis

John Ennis founded Journeys in Design in 2017, curating and producing design-led exhibitions, walks, talks, and workshops across Scotland and beyond. His work is motivated by 20 years as a family doctor and the wealth of evidence that health is improved for those joining in creative fellowship. With Journeys in Design, John explores materials, heritage, well-being, and sustainable futures including the world of flax fibre with Our Linen Stories programme, exhibiting at Dovecot Studio in Edinburgh and touring throughout Scotland and N.Ireland.

Description of talk:

John will offer us an overview of Our Linen Stories, Scotland, a rolling programme of exhibitions and events inaugurated in 2018. This continues to gather a rich set of stories and objects and was most recently the catalyst for Scotland's first Flax and Linen Festival. Reflecting on the power of cloth to connect for well-being, John will highlight key Flax Futures projects: introducing Making Millie and Wild Weaving, visiting the Flax Mill Silverburn and updating on progress towards a Regenerative Textile Network for Scotland.