

Crossing Boundaries – Mill Dale Project (2009)
Sarah Burgess with Mainly Stitch group



Mainly Stitch group, detail from *Crossing Boundaries* (2009) textiles, various dimensions and media.

Over the summer of 2009 I ran an **experimental project** with an adult textile group who meet in the Derbyshire Dales. Mainly Stitch had been working towards an exhibition of their individual work for two years and we decided that it would be interesting to run a group project as part of this.

One of my **aims** was to help the group to be more relaxed with their own work and use the group dynamic to produce a more open ended, experimental piece. I also hoped that they would become more confident in making independent creative decisions. Earlier in the year we had produced **research drawings and collected materials** in Mill Dale and we decided you use these as the starting point for the work. (My ideas for the project were originally prompted by a project run by textile artist Gwen Hedley with a small group of friends).

We held one **group session** at which we worked on long lengths of wall paper lining, using charcoal and graphite. The group made marks from their Mill Dale research on

the paper then everyone moved round the paper and worked with black paint layering and responding to the existing marks, tentatively at first then with **growing**

confidence. Several more moves added white paint and one colour. Then the group tore their paper and exchanged pieces with the person opposite to them, fixing the new piece into their own work. By this stage there was plenty of laughter and everyone had **overcome their sensitivity and felt less precious** about their own work.

We also painted a long piece of fabric in the same way and at the end of the session everyone took home a piece of the painted fabric and a section of the group paperwork as inspiration.

We used an **agreed timetable** for the work to progress around the group with each person taking custody of the growing work for one week. They were asked to respond to the work and incorporate at least a postage sized piece of their painted fabric, as well as adding other fabric or stitch. They also had permission to cut into the stitched cloth and rejoin or move the pieces. Some members of the group made small **interventions** and others dramatically changed the work.



Sarah Burgess, 'Eternal' (2007) 156 x 156 cms, cotton organdie.

The resulting textile was full of **energy and movement**, reflecting its summer journey which had encompassed a variety of excitements, including being accidentally set on fire. This way of working was new for me too, once we had completed the group session **I had no control** over what the individuals in the group would do next. Trust was a big part of this project and I was proud of the way that the group interacted with the process, even if not everyone liked the final piece. There is also **potential** for continuing to work with the group piece, dividing it again and asking each member to make a further response.