

JESSICA **OGDEN**
STILL

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication accompanies the exhibition Jessica Ogden: Still held at 31–33 Church Street, London NW8 8ES, 26 May–24 June 2017. Together they constitute the first comprehensive study of the Jamaican designer-artist Jessica Ogden.

Jessica Ogden opened up her archive and home, recounted memories and ideas to me, a relative stranger. Such trust is rare and humbling. Without her support this project would have remained a paper. Add to this her unflinching generosity and hospitality towards me while a guest in her home made this an extraordinary experience.

Without the help from a large number of people and institutions this publication would not have been possible. Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon Graduate School Staff Fund kindly funded the publication. Tamsin Blanchard accepted, without hesitation, my invitation to contribute an essay, wonderful. For the production of the publication I was able to call on Susan Hutton for the transcription of the Jamaica recordings, Judy Tither for copy-editing, Tanayia Woolery for the supply of images from the Jessica Ogden archive and Wellington Press, all under an incredibly tight deadline. Thank you.

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A special thank you to Syd Shelton. He designed this book and the marketing material for the exhibition, took photographs for the project, as well as helping to build structures for the exhibition, all as sponsorship in kind.

Carol Tulloch 2017

JESSICA OGDEN STILL

EDITED BY CAROL TULLOCH

JESSICA OGDEN: MAKING CONVERSATION CAROL TULLOCH

The Jamaican designer-artist Jessica Ogden has been an influential fashion, textiles and home-wares designer since 1993. The exhibition, *Jessica Ogden: Still*, relates this through her archive of designs, the collection of contextual reference and familial material. The decision to hold the show in a vacant retail shop reflects an aspect of her design philosophy of re-use and repurposing of pre-used textiles, of garments and material fragments as contemporary cultural statements. The curatorial technique used to extrapolate the meaning of all this to visitors and Jessica¹ herself, was conversation, that has proved to be about an interchange of time, history and the personal.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

In December 2013 I was invited by Avis Charles, founder of Avis Charles Associates and Women Entrepreneurs Network International, to speak at the “Textiles and Garments Buyers Mentor Group Global Platform for Action on Sourcing from Women Vendors” at the House of Commons. The forum included designers from Ethiopia, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea and Peru. Avis sent me images of the designers’ work, which were interesting but did not reflect their respective cultures. Not that this had to be emblazoned across their collections, but I felt some indication of cultural references would lend their designs a unique identity. I decided to base my presentation on designers who had achieved this and simultaneously maintained an individualised design philosophy enabling them to contribute to new fashion directions. I thought immediately of Jessica who established her London-based fashion label in 1993.

Jessica’s clothing designs, produced until 2006, combined references to her birthplace and homeland of Jamaica; for example, the intense colours of the island as in the vibrant pink of the hibiscus flower, the practice of repair and re-use that is an economic necessity and aesthetic statement for some Jamaicans. These references have been transformed by her eloquent evocations in stitch, and her use of madras check cotton fabric that has had an association with Jamaica since the late nineteenth century when Britain exported cloth produced in Madras, India, and England. It is a fabric used extensively by Jamaica’s black working class women since then, primarily as headwraps, and which is now seen as the country’s national cloth. These are generic references that are part of the fabric of Jamaican life and history. Although Jessica produced Autumn/Winter collections, it is through her Spring/Summer ranges that she gave full vent to the transnational references of “back home” and her interests in historical events and cultural practices in the rest of the world.

On revisiting Jessica in the context of the forum, I was reminded of her creative specialism and dress history relevance. I mentioned this to Dean Ricketts of the Watchmen Agency, who in turn introduced me to Jessica by email in 2014. From there the conversation began.

THE JOURNEY OF A CONVERSATION

The exhibition and publication has developed from four key conversations, a project that in turn is framed by the possibilities of conversation. The first, held on 11th June 2015, was an informal meeting at the Chelsea Arts Club, London, between Jessica, Dean and myself, but where I made notes of significant statements during the interchange between us on how we might do something on her collection of designs and contextual reference material. The second conversation took place on 24th May 2016, at A.P.C. in Paris, surrounded by Jessica’s extensive archive that has not been catalogued. Again, this was an unstructured conversation to assess the range of material held in the archive and to “bounce” ideas between us about what an exhibition could be. No recording was made, I just made a note of key points raised. The next conversation was on 12th October 2016 at Church Street, London, NW8 between Abby Viner, project manager of the exhibition, Jessica, Dean and me. This was to view vacant shops and to discuss further how the exhibition could progress in that area of North London. The final, defining, conversation of 1st-10th March 2017 was between Jessica and me, and took place at her home in Ocho Rios, Jamaica. The longevity of these conversations was partly due to life’s unpredictability. The momentum was maintained during the lengthy intervals between meetings with Jessica through emails and reflection.

This element of the project remained free form. There were no themes, although there was a basic list of questions to guide the conversation. As I wrote in my research journal under the heading “conversation ideas/plan”, “Let Jessica Speak” (Tulloch, Journal 2017: xii unpublished). I designed the conversation to continue the interchange of thoughts and reflect another aspect of a conversation: “The action of living or having one’s being *in* a place or *among* persons ... [the] occupation or engagement with things, in the way of business or study” (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Conversation as telling is a recognized life narrative (Andrews et al 2013; Drew et al 2006), it provides the space “to share ... experiences with others, not to import information about some historical event” (Patterson 2013: 38). Different kinds of conversations are valid in the telling of life narratives. For me, the conversations, formal and informal, with



1. Jessica Ogden in her studio in Jamaica 2017

familiar and unfamiliar settings at home and abroad, enabled Jessica the freedom to talk about herself in an unrestricted way, as Sue Kossew states: ‘the autobiographical self is always one that is filtered through “memory, culture and subjective interpretation”’ (Kossew 2014:190). This underwrites my aim to take a relaxed conversational route for the Jamaica session, rather than a formal interview with set questions, as I wanted to provide Jessica with the freedom to re-engage with the designs she produced between 1993 and 2006, held in boxes on the outskirts of Paris, to reflect on that period of her life, and consider how that moment is a hinge between her life before and after she began designing commercially in the early 1990s.

Whilst staying with Jessica in Jamaica other key conversations took place. The Skype conversation with the fashion writer, Tamsin Blanchard, formed the basis of her essay included here, and contextualizes Jessica’s work in the cultural world in which it operates. The other interchange of ideas was with exhibition maker, Judith Clark, who was invited by me to design *Jessica Ogden: Still*. During our three-way conversation, Jessica made the pivotal statement that working with her archive is like “leafing through a book that you love”, a personal archival relationship that has informed the design and narrative of the exhibition. This contributed

to Judith reframing the show as an installation.

I cannot express enough the incredible value of that ten-day conversation, a conversation that was essentially living with Jessica for that time. As Jessica said, “We would not be here now if it were not for that meeting [and conversation] in Jamaica” when we met with Judith, Abby and production manager, Laura Thornley, for the final stages of the exhibition on 15th May 2017.

As a result of the above, *Jessica Ogden: Still* is founded on what I call a “curatorial conversation” that has enabled the installation to be a self-portrait of Jessica. This is echoed in the concrete poem *Jessica Ogden: Making Time*, featured here, constructed from statements made by Jessica during the conversations in London, Paris and Jamaica, that includes reference to her “Conversation Collection”, designs and installation fashion show developed out of visual conversations between friends.

THE PERSONAL

The meeting of past and present is powerful in Jessica’s family home in Jamaica. She is adding, respectfully but with a unique eye, to the creative paths established by her mother, Annabella Ogden-Proudlock, who passed away in 2015. This legacy includes her mother’s collection of work by Jamaican artists, her craft and art

practice, and her design and building of the family home. This is exemplified in the recent refurbishment of the holiday beachside cottage, originally built and decorated by her mother, that includes repainting the interior coloured walls white so guests have the space to breath, and the design of a new bed produced by local carpenters. Recently Jessica discovered and displayed two 1970s drawings of Jamaican life by her late father, David Ogden, cinematographer, director, musician and illustrator. These add-ons, a key term for Jessica and styling technique of garments she devised for her installation fashion shows, has resulted in the family home being an entanglement of familial creativity since the 1970s.

Jessica has embraced this past-present-future tangent of generational continuity (Tulloch 2017). For her, the personal has a place in designed pieces destined to be worn by others. One example is an apron designed for her Storm collection. A leather strap was secured to the waistband by hand-stitching and safety pins to make it the tie of the apron. The body of the garment was made of an antique quilt pulled apart, stitched again and again over the original stitches of the quilt. The feature of note is that the strap was once part of a leather bag that belonged to her mother (2). Such personal references do not dominate, they were private signifiers that at once mark “the dynamic of connectivity and becoming” (Slager 2012: 79) for Jessica. This apron is just one example of the many garments and accessories of Jessica’s archive of her London studio designs, which forms the major content of the installation Jessica Ogden: Still. Such pieces communicate how Jessica shared with potential buyers the importance of the personal, of lives lived with others, by encouraging them that all this matters; that you can literally wear past-present connections. What Jessica illustrates is the ability to reflect personal history, quietly, through making. Her repurposing of fabric, of pre-used quilts, into garments shown to the fashion cognoscenti, harbour a depth not often equated with “fashion”. It is not about wearing one’s life on one’s sleeve, but she understands that, consciously or not, we carry history with us. She has simply applied this to produce textiles that in turn envelop the body, because the present is always touched by the past to help define the now. What Jessica illustrates is that this is what contributes to individuality, something that you can wear.

Through such textiles, Jessica is able to reflect on and project history, a quiet narrative on time. In this sense, her work connects with the *History* series of watercolours by Callum Innes; squares of two colours layered on top of one another to create a third, the original colours evidenced at the edges to make “each square an exposed still in an



2. Jessica's sewing bag

unfolding narrative” which are “not historical documents, nor do they evoke a recognizable past, but they hold within themselves a history” (Bond 2013: 7). Jessica uses stitch as the channel of this personal historical conversation. Her practice of stitching, during this period, captured time “to close the gap between the past and present, to effectively ‘suture’ them for a new period” (Kosew 2014:196).

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Jessica does not fear time, she confronts it. By “fighting time ... doing things, not standing still” (Rosenthal 2017), Jessica harnesses its possibilities to speak for and represent the user of time. This informs how she *makes* her life in Jamaica now, of making space one’s own and having the courage to do this; to devise a rhythm to living in a space – a morning swim, the use of table cloths as an everyday aesthetic, working on designs for A.P.C. or commissioning works for Harmony Hall, the art gallery established in 1981 by her mother and stepfather, Peter Proudlock, even a visit to her local farmers’ market is a creative act. All this reiterates that there is pleasure to be had in making in all its guises, the sense of freedom that making provides, of simply enjoying the moment of living.

‘ADD-ON’

Patches and patchwork are signature details and techniques of Jessica’s designs. Motifs that she has often said were partially inspired by the way market women in Jamaica patched and repaired their aprons. She also indicates later in this publication that patchwork is a reference to familial garments that have been part of her life since the 1970s. During my initial journey from Kingston to Jessica’s home, I noted that patchwork is an aesthetic of Jamaica’s landscape, the patchwork homes of corrugated tin in different colours, not unlike an abstract painting. I call these semi-permanent homes survival patchwork, a Jamaican detail that reminded me of Jessica’s work. When I mentioned this to Jessica, she said that it was not a reference she had consciously noted. Yet during our car journeys together, Jessica would draw my attention to corrugated patchworked walls. And if one looks at some of Jessica’s patchworks for A.P.C. the subliminal intuitive richness of these architectural structures bond Jessica and Jamaica further, through patchwork, as both recognize it as an essential technique to live, to be. Her random use of contrasting cloth, haberdashery and applique as a patch to suggest the repair of beautiful, often delicate garments of silk translates into a make-do feature that can be worn like a badge of survival for the garment and the wearer.

Drawings made straight onto the garment (11) underwrites the immediacy of play as one aspect of Jessica’s practice. This is play as experimentation borne, again, out of intuition, something that Jessica advocates as enabling freedom for the embellisher. An element of Jessica’s stitch philosophy is narrative stitching where the unique imprint of the stitcher’s presence is left in the work, becomes entangled with the cloth. It was an act of making that Jessica encouraged in her assistants during the production of her collections – to engage in free-hemming, where the stitcher gives in to intuition to guide their stitching; a process that Jessica has incorporated into the installation to engage visitors in the creation of a seventy-five metre free-stitched hem.

What this curatorial conversation has revealed about the significance of Jessica’s practice is that she articulates the complexity of plain speaking through making, specifically the stitching, hand-decoration and composition of cloth into meaningful garments that we can actually wear as material interchange of time, history and the personal.

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¹I have chosen to call all the members of this curatorial conversation by their christian names to reflect the friendship and trust that developed between us.

LONDON
CHELSEA ARTS CLUB
11 JUNE 2015

Still.

Free stitch ... you're the stitcher, it's your story.

Jamaica has a culture of mending, re-use, how you patch.

Collaboration is important

Learning from looking

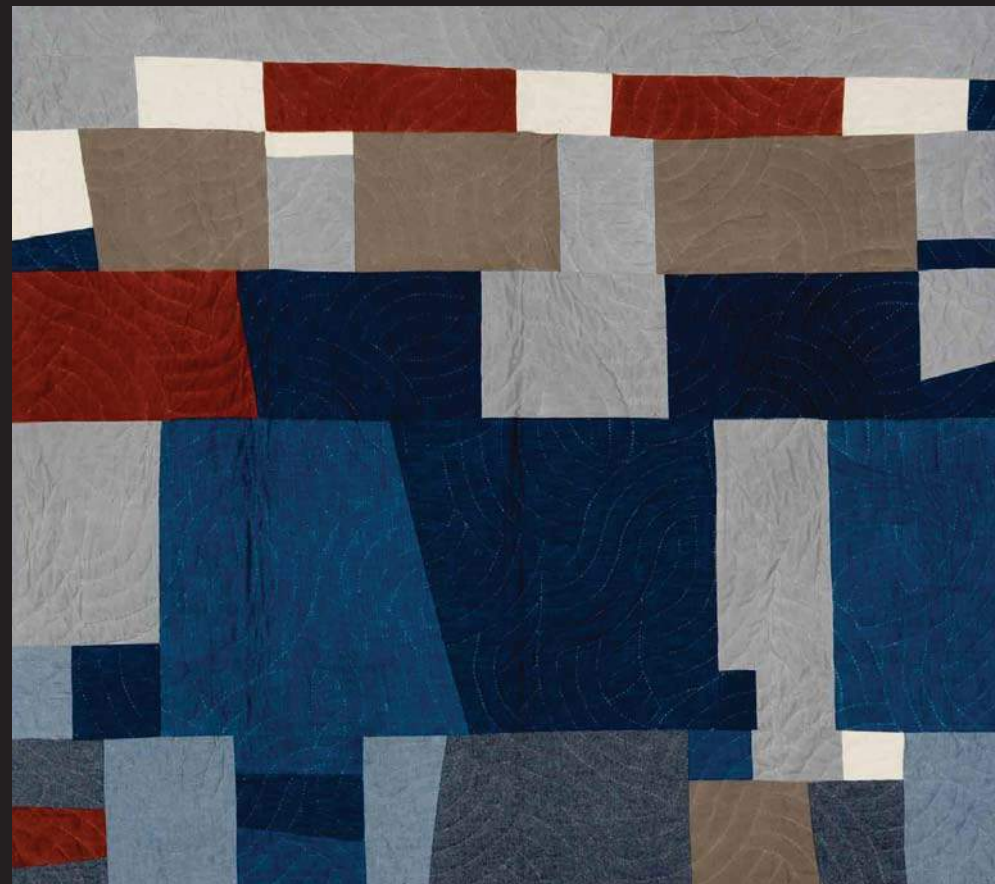


3. Collaborations, Fred Perry Clothing

The studio is our world

Here in England you can find antique things and unravel what lays underneath.

Pitt Rivers Museum, a favourite place,



4. Collaborations, A.P.C Quilts

Quilts more historical, clothing more specific

I want to make a studio again.

A long hem with different sections, hemmed/stitched by different people. The border becomes a 'story board', preserving family history techniques.

PARIS
A.P.C.
24 MAY 2016

An add on.



Things I did not make but collected. The tools that you use to make with are very important to me.

Hand sewing brings back the meditation when you sew ... free-hemming, letting stitches run you.

Some things hold a great memory, some don't.

Scenarios

Throw me in a room and work with the pieces.

Things I can still stand behind.

OCHO RIOS
JAMAICA
1-10 MARCH 2017



6. Annabella Ogden-Proudlock's favourite thinking space

Coming back here has been a chance for me to be in that world again. It's about being calm with yourself trying to see things and take them step by step, and maybe that's what that whole stillness means now, that I'll get that space again, Because I dream of it again, of this new work practice. Not new necessarily, but, re-engaging myself in my work practice, in a committed way.

It's about taking the gifts that she [left], like, let's say, the Annabella Boxes, and taking them forward in a way that brings a new life to them.

It is this thing of having a yard, that's something very very inspiring; your space is not restricted. So if I think of a print table, it's like, well how long?

What has also been happening are these exchanges with artists and craftspeople here, which goes directly back to making and hands-on it's opened up these possibilities again.

PRACTICE

In this moment of looking back, especially at the pieces that I stand behind they really are to do with textiles, and working within that, come out as clothes.

CONNECTION, RECONNECTION, 'ADD-ON'

The way I see this experience, if we go back to that example of the seaside cottage, Mum had her dream, she built it, and obviously, that's hugely inspiring in itself. But when I came to redo it, I did cry, because I was painting over her colours, but I realised that she left a path, but that path needs to be my path.

Mum loved Jamaica. Mum, obviously, taught us that this land is beautiful and it's giving all the time. But you have to also give back. There is an exchange going on.

I know the last thing she wants is for me to be living her life; you step away to come into this, and be present in this.

There is something very idyllic about this particular spot, there's the madness and there's the calmness. I need that balance, and maybe that's also what's given me some space to start dreaming again, is because, being back here has made a little bit of space in my mind, there is space to reflect that.



7. Jessica's desk in the big hall of her house, Ocho Rios

I am finding being back here, being very very present. Maybe it's the pace that I live here.

I'm busier now, more than I have been in the last years. I feel at this point in my life, that it doesn't feel like, things are closing down, but things are opening up.

I do make sure I do a little bit of gardening, because that really gives me a lot of pleasure.

FAMILIAL LEGACY

My family history is intriguing to me. The fact that my grandmother did batik, and her genes, you know, were passed on. Mum's absolute support and belief in arts being sustainable.



8. Crocheted apron

We were encouraged to have that space to make

It was Mum who taught me to sew, that's from her making her own clothes. That link to me makes this whole journey of sewing make sense.

I do remember making my first skirt in that big hall. The sewing machine was off in a corner – actually where my computer is now. I do remember that feeling of this being so exciting.



9. Keitas Stripes Collection

I carry round a spool of thread, a friend gave it to me. I think I have maybe, two metres of thread left on it, but it's OK, every now and again I use it. So that spool, that object becomes important. And that's very personal.

The exhibition could be a portrait of a time in London. It's not to make it a retrospective, it is a real life because it is personal. I think there is something that can be held on to, this was a moment, but obviously that moment isn't finished, and just put away because my work practice continued and where it evolved to and where it will evolve to.

TIME, STITCHING AND MARKING A LIFE

You have to make that first stitch. That propels you. When you look at a piece that's been darned, you know that that's somebody's time. Those stitches hold that time. What you can get from that simple magic, it's not so simple because it is magic, is a whole identity. You literally can make an identity, which is something incredible, and I think that's the empowerment.



10. Whisper Collection

A MEMORY

One of my memories has to do with the needle and the thread, it is iconography.

I remember a summer of just wearing my first collection, and being like feeling, this is great, I'm me.

I remember when I was asked to thread the needle for my father, because his eyesight was not as good,

I think he was sewing on a button.

That memory followed me a lot, that action of threading a needle, because that was a memory to my father.

When I was hand sewing a lot more I remember being very happy to have that memory, it was a constant reminder of that person.

MATERIAL CONNECTION

There's a dress of Mum's that Mum made for herself in the Seventies, it became basically my life. A long wrap patchwork dress. It's travelled with me. But it became my identity in a way, because all the things of me being patchwork queen are also being very referenced, I reference myself very much – that era is my childhood.



11. Hand-drawn marks on dress

What if Mum had never made that dress for herself, then what would have happened to me? I have no idea

There's an Annabella Box which has a drawing of mine that Mum put on it, it's very special: I still have it.

So, there's these collections of objects that gets carried round.

And there's some I've lost. I did a show in London, it was surrounding death. I used a small photograph which had a silver frame, very rough, of my father and I. That is lost. But I still have the piece I made from it, which was a cushion with the date of his death embroidered on it. But I do have a real thing now, it's not lost in a way, the memory is as strong as having it.



12. Threads That Tie Collection

THE LONDON STUDIO

The studio, it was a family, it was like no other studio that was going on at that time. Some people freaked out because, this group of women doing mad embroidery. It was very gentle.

There were certain key interviews. I remember one of them was in i-D. They visited the studio in Lant Street while Mum was there, we were preparing for a show. It was interesting from a journalist's point of view. 'What's going on here? It's supposed to be manic fashion, but it's very calm'.

The scenario was that you helped a friend get dressed up to go out. All the changes happened on stage.

FASHION SHOWS

Installations that people moved in.

The second one was called 'Clutter' (or Conversations). I was working Lynette Garland, Amber Rowlands, Ellen Nolan, Abby Kettlewell, photographers, stylists. I asked them all to do self-portraits.

Then I met this amazing woman, Suzy Wilson, a theatre director. Through her we gathered a group of five actresses. So each of the characters was one of these friends.

It was like a sewing club



13. Whisper Collection



14. After Midnight Collection



15. Annabella Collection

The exercise did with my friends was the spark.

This was in the The Notre Dame Hall under Leicester Square

The five of them were manic, running around, Should she wear this? Should she wear that? Undressing her, dressing her.

The third one was 'Threads That Tie', about family and friends. I asked each of the friends that I had, or was working with, if they could invite relatives, a best friend to be part of the show. It was a group of family and friends wearing the clothes. So you had Abi with her two sisters; you had Lynette with her two sisters and niece. I had my aunty. That [It] was presented the day after 9/11. I remember, saying 'do we still do it?' Because it was about friends and family we decided to go ahead. It was incredible. The whole world was falling out. But, going ahead and doing it, literally, we were holding hands.

BECOMING JESSICA OGDEN IN LONDON

Arriving in London when you are eighteen and having no clue, and slowly you find your world within this, that you weren't born into it, but you're making it. Your vision becomes clearer, not only with yourself but where you are, and what you look at, the people you surround yourself with. You get your world to be your world properly.

TEXTILES

When, I left NoLogo, I thought what would happen if I chose fabric rather than fabric being given to me. By choosing a group of pure white, a group of pure black fabrics, and then I built something which was very textural, which you can read like the kind of sculpture I wanted to do when I was younger. From that exercise I can create fabric. I mean, I wasn't weaving, but the embellishment, all the printing was in-house.



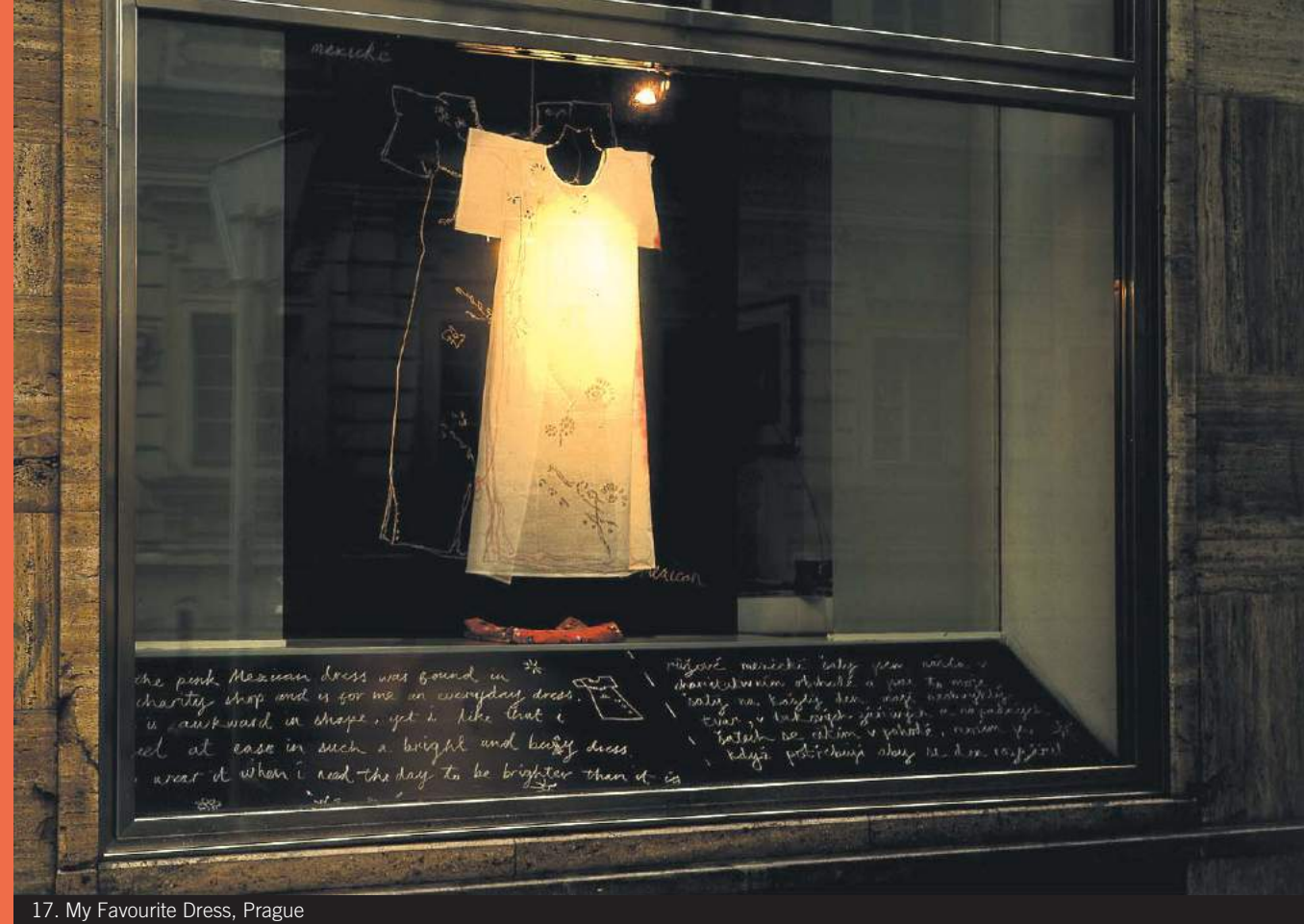
16. Conversations Collection

Whether it's using a stamp pad from a stationery shop and repeating that, or screen printing on small screens, so very manageable. A lot of block printing, that's very simple to do. Another big part of the print was with watercolour on fabric, again something very accessible for people not trained as a printer could do. And working alongside people who had different skills, like my long-term print person, Jenny Lapsley, there were different forays into printing with printers outside as things developed.

I guess thinking of this period of time, it was about what you can make happen there and then with this thing that we call magic, which is a needle and thread. You know, that's just back to the basic.

DESIGNER-MAKER-STITCHER-ARTIST

the whole experience was learning about myself and design, like an artist's way of development.



17. My Favourite Dress, Prague

FURNITURE

Cupboards and drawers, things like that, I'm very interested in.

It was always a very personal work

Being aware that I was developing my own identity.

Then there were some things which were about what I wanted to wear.

Or the magic when it became both.

My blue cupboard came from Catherine Pole in Alfies Antiques. It was what she used to sell her fabrics from and I just fell in love with it. Unfortunately this has gone out of my life.



18. Cupboard installation

REPURPOSING

Finding an antique quilt, and being inspired by it, knowing it's had a life before, it's going to go through this life with you, and, it will have a whole other life going on afterwards in a new form.



19. Re-use fabric Kimono

CLOTH AS HOME

I remember when I went to the Amuse museum in Tokyo in 2013, one thing that amazed me, and I didn't know before, was that, some of the kimono pieces, the whole family slept in it. There was just something so special, a family object that actually held the family.

You can't imagine what their life was before, much less what it will be



20. Repurposing

I still get letters or emails about 'that kimono I got', and people patch it themselves.

I'm speaking specifically of the kimonos we made.

CUSTOMIZING

Customizing for me, it's a gentler aesthetic.

A.P.C. would send a box of old stock; our studio would customise it, and it would be sent back. That's how, one of the ways the relationship with APC started, and it went on for about two years.



21. Patched sweetness watermelon skirt



DRESSES

The exhibition in Prague called 'My Favourite Dresses', had a base dress which was Mum's watermelon dress, which is still around.

22. Watermelon dress made by Annabella Ogden-Proudlock

THE CONTINUOUS THREAD OF JESSICA OGDEN TAMSIN BLANCHARD

Piecing together the various fragments of Jessica Ogden's life, it becomes quickly apparent the one constant is a needle and thread. And a cat. She's a figure who commands incredible respect from anyone who knows her work, from the customised second-hand clothes she made for Oxfam's visionary NoLoGo project in the early 1990s, to the hand-sewn kimonos and delicately deconstructed clothes of her own collection and the patchwork quilts made from leftover fabrics she now designs for A.P.C. She is a crafter and a grafter with the sensitivity and the eye of an artist. And while circumstances have not always made it easy for her to make a business from her craft, her relationship with the needle and thread remains unshakeable.

In many ways, it is a thread that runs from generation to generation. Sewing for Ogden has never been a simple act of joining two pieces of fabric together or adjusting a seam to make a skirt fit. It has always been something altogether more emotionally charged. "I was taught to machine sew early; Mum made her clothes in the 70's in Jamaica, and to our horror also our school uniforms," said Ogden. "Embroidery and all else was picked up once having my label. My grandmother was also a textile artist, she was incredibly creative with batik and Mum used to commission work from her for Operation Friendship, a charity started in Jamaica, that Mum made into Christmas cards. Joan's genes are there somewhere, although that particular skill was not passed on to me."

Ogden's mother, Annabella Ogden-Proudlock, was an artist and founder of Harmony Hall, a gallery showing the work of local Jamaican artists. After the death of her mother in 2015 and stepfather in 2016, Ogden returned to Jamaica that year from Paris to take on the job of running the gallery and the family's two holiday cottages next to the house where Ogden now lives in Ocho Rios. She still has some of her mother's homemade clothes from the 1970s alongside pieces she has collected over the years for her own research like an Afghan wedding dress and a Peruvian poncho. "I have her patchwork wrap dress, her voile Rasta colours cord-trimmed dress, her sun scarf, her first homemade batik vest. They are my talismans."

Ogden grew up surrounded by craft. Her mother started a business called Annabella Boxes in the late 1970s, hand-crafted in cedar wood with beautifully painted lids of Jamaican scenes, each one different. "Living in her constant world of championing arts and craft in Jamaica was an enriching childhood. No doubt this was a huge influence."

Ogden went to school in Jamaica before four years at boarding school in America followed by a year at Rhode Island School of Design. She

says despite the fact it was a great course, she was feeling trapped. In 1988 she went to London for the summer with a high school friend and decided she wanted to stay. "We both rebelled and said we would not return." She was allowed to stay in London on the proviso that she continued her education. Ogden took up a place at Byam Shaw Fine Art School with the intention of becoming a sculptor. "I felt at home in England, not America. I had visited London as a child, my grandparents mostly, but the main draw at that point was a sense of being independent after years in boarding schools. I was eighteen at the time and it seems it was my first rebellion, yet it seems staying in London was one of my most instinctive, and best decisions."

She was influenced by the art she saw in the burgeoning London contemporary gallery scene and the beginning of the Young British Artists (YBA) phenomenon that included Damien Hirst, Sarah Lucas, Tracey Emin and the late Angus Fairhurst. In a like-minded vein of installation practice at this time, Ogden said: "My studio space became a mini gallery of what I thought was somehow conceptual art. I thought I was thought provoking and perhaps the fact that I was not doing classic art was also a rebellion of sorts, but this was my very stubborn path." She was working hard, experimenting with themes around identity. A friend's mother was a fashion designer and Ogden was intrigued by her sewing machine, not realising how much she missed the one she left behind in the States.

During her last two years at Byam Shaw, she volunteered to work with Oxfam's NoLoGo project. "It was a space to make and work and as a group we were guided by the brilliant Janette Swift [who led a group of artists, recyclers and fashion designers called Reactivat], and we made some headlines in our own small way. Fabrics were literally thrown down into our basement and we got to do what we wanted with them. We had the first choice of donated garments to work and play with, and we did play. There were some very 'interesting' pieces made!" Other NoLoGo volunteers at the time included the guerrilla recycler, Noki. "By my last year in college my head was switched into this. I made work back in art school with what I found there, and ended up doing a final project of both a 'conceptual' piece, and a very mad fashion show with another student. It was clear by then I wanted to sew and only sew."

While Ogden had friends who were at fashion school, she was about to embark on a fashion education all of her own. Making patchwork knit pieces for friends was one thing. Making them into a business, with new ideas from one season to the next, was quite another. But she



23. Keitas Stripes Collection

hit on a creative nerve and a young fashion editor at i-D magazine – Edward Enninful – used some of her first collection in a story for issue August 1993, shot by Craig McDean and with make-up by Pat McGrath; more press and buyers followed. Ogden remembers that first collection: "It was made up of around seven shapes, in only all white, all black, or grey. They were shredded muslin on what I proudly labelled 100% polyester backing. It was my version of punk, without fully knowing what punk was. But it felt right to wear, to make a story of my own."

It must have been quite something as an eighteen-year-old who had spent her teenage years in a boarding school being parachuted into early 1990s London. There was still a rawness to the city, an overhang of the 1980s defined, for example, by divergent cultural impact of street style philosophies such as The New Romantics, Hip Hop and Buffalo alongside proactive critical practices of the Black British Arts Movement. As well as the YBAs, there was enormous innovation and creativity in fashion. "I felt very out of my depth," she recalls. "It was the time of Hussein Chalayan and Alexander McQueen. They had started to make huge waves."

Ogden's fashion was gentler, craftier, more akin perhaps to what Martin Margiela and Xuly Bet were doing in Paris, and perhaps an unconscious continuation of some of the work that Christopher Nemeth had been doing in London in the 1980s. Certainly they all had a fascination with remaking old clothes, recycling, and customising. She was taken under the wing of the fashion PR Kate Monckton along with Soho club entrepreneur Roland Mouret, felt experimenter Shelley Fox, and avant-garde conceptualists Boudicca. "This gave me a kind of officialdom that I felt I needed, and I can truly say it made the next stages happen." She was also finding creative collaborators who shared her vision, including the stylist Lynette Garland and the photographers Amber Rowland and Ellen Nolan. "Together a conversation of our own was happening. It was a quieter conversation than the bigger fashion world was having, but it was a conversation that was valid."

The highly influential stylist Anna Cockburn, herself someone who collected and put together clothes that might have been lost and found, used Ogden's clothes in her work, not least for the December 1998 cover of i-D, featuring a young Gisele Bündchen photographed by David Sims, his first cover for the magazine. "When the cover came out I was pinching myself, that this incredible team championed my work. The top Gisele wore was one of my favourite fabrics of all time

(still is), and somehow, that it got this honour, made me feel that I must know something about something if that makes any sense!" Other collaborations at the time included working with Stephen Male who was the art director of her company Jessica Ogden, commissions to customise sportswear with the stylist Jane How which took Ogden out of her comfort zone (very ahead of its time too), and alongside jewellery designer and stylist Judy Blame, who she met through his house mate, Enniful, and who in turn, introduced Ogden to the singer Neneh Cherry who wore her clothes.

While McQueen and Chalayan were leading the way with their extraordinary showmanship; Ogden's shows were more low-key affairs. She cast friends and actors rather than traditional models. For the Spring/Summer 2002 collection "Threads that Tie", shown the day after 9/11, she used her friends and their families. She liked to call on a more diverse group of women, perhaps more reflective of her own social mix. For her Spring/Summer 2005 show "Kieta's Stripes", Ogden worked with model agencies in Jamaica and had models flown over for the show. "The spirit was clear," she says. "It was abundant in colour and rich in the diversity in its making: from knit, crochet, woodblock print, screen print, to one-offs. The models strutted with beaming smiles which was somehow different."

Ultimately though, running a fashion business became suffocating for Ogden. The process of making clothes that she felt had integrity required very different skills to keep everything afloat, paying staff, financing production, maintaining sales: "I found myself cooped up in the office, not breathing. We then had four boxes of hand-knit [garments] for Selfridges 'lost', and then found being sold on eBay. We had a break-in at the studio, all computers gone." In the end her stepfather gave her some good advice. "Perhaps I need [to] see how things really are, not what I believe they could be."

Declaring bankruptcy in 2006 was a painful time for Ogden, one she still feels uncomfortable thinking about. During her time running her own label she had started to work with the French brand A.P.C., doing bits of styling and customising unsold stock for them to sell – at one point up to fifty garments a month. When she closed the company, A.P.C.'s owners, Jean and Judith Touitou, stepped in and invited her to stay with them in Paris. "I got a chance in Paris to re-invent my world," she says. Jean Touitou also had the brilliant foresight to help pack up Ogden's studio in London, putting the entire contents into storage for her at his Paris headquarters.

From Paris, she spent some time in Japan and then after travelling to

India with the Touitous, they created "Madras" in 2004, a collection made by artisans in India, designed by Ogden. Since 2009 she has worked with A.P.C. to produce a series of quilts using their fabric remnants, these are produced in 'Rounds' twice a year. It is a project close to both Ogden and Touitou's hearts. When he worked for Kenzo in the 1970s, Touitou would take fabric remnants home to his mother who would make them into quilts. It is a way for A.P.C. to do something meaningful with its waste and for Ogden to continue to create in the most sustainable and resourceful way she can, continuing her alchemy of making discarded textiles into something precious.

So, that needle and thread are never far from Ogden's side, particularly now she has a new studio space in Jamaica where she goes to focus on new projects, as well as an ongoing commission for Touitou, which she has been working on for two years, which Ogden says, "involves a very meticulous appliqué of the Mediterranean. It has brought me back into hand stitch, which is my kind of meditation."

Now it seems Ogden is perfectly placed to start something new – or more likely in her world, to rework something she has already started, "I brought a container to Jamaica of all that studio stuff, the scissors, the bits of fabric, my collection of cats and cat objects." Cats have become a bit of a motif with a collection that began when an aunt used to call her Jessicat. "Mum cottoned on and would always give [me] a cat-related present. It then went into a full-blown study with a collection in all shapes and sizes and materials, and then there is the constant companion of the real thing that I have not been without since eleven. Different ones have taken me through the different times in my life."

Now that she is back in Jamaica continuing the work her mother began and working with local craftspeople, Ogden seems to be in her element. "I am working with craftspeople to make products that are new with old skills." Her home serves as a kind of showcase for some of the pieces she has commissioned like a crochet lampshade produced by Sheldon in March 2017. Ogden is also thinking about an apron exchange project where she will swap a new apron for an old one with the ladies who sell in her local market. It is a continuation of an old obsession with vintage aprons (she has a collection of over 500 of them). Her new studio is also making her feel excited and she has thoughts of developing a resort line, which seems to make perfect sense. She was never really a winter designer, anyway.

So here she is, full circle back to where she started out, busy being in the present, making and responding to new directions.

JESSICA OGDEN BIOGRAPHY

2017

Design of Jamaica t-shirts for A.P.C. mens and women
Exhibition and publication "Jessica Ogden: Still", London

2016

Invited exhibition with Laura Facey, Orange Hall, Jamaica
Director of Harmony Hall Gallery, Jamaica
Continued collaboration with A.P.C. Quilts

2015

Quilt collaboration with RUN HOME, NY, Tokyo, LA
Continued collaboration with A.P.C. Quilts
Moved to Jamaica

2014

A.P.C. for ISETAN installation of patchwork items, Tokyo
Group exhibition PERFECT LOVERS, BronxArtSpace, NY
Continued collaboration with A.P.C. Quilts

2013

Design consultant with JEN KAO, NY
Unpublished collaboration on quilts for LOUIS VUITTON, Paris
Continued collaboration with A.P.C. Quilts
Design of A.P.C. Quilts/ ACE HOTEL LONDON

2012

Exhibition of watercolors, 3-D objects, quilts and archive pieces "Lily's Castle in e Sand", e Apartment, Copenhagen
Design of Quilts for FENNICA, Japan
Continued Collaboration with A. P. C. Quilts

2011

Exclusive collaborations with Madras/Urban Outfitters, A. P. C. Quilts/Anthropologie
Continued collaboration with A. P. C., Madras, A. P. C. Quilts, ASOS

2010

Installation in Bonton, Paris, in collaboration with Lee Benjamin
Continued A. P. C. Collaboration with A. P. C., Madras, A. P. C. Quilts, ASOS, F-Troupe

2009

Design A.P.C. Patchwork Quilts, Limited Edition, continual project
Collaboration with ASOS, 10 piece High Summer collection for 2010
Continued collaborations with A.P.C. Madras, People Tree, F-Troupe

2008

Installation "Les Fleures Blanches", Paris, Journal Standard, Japan
Continued collaborations with A.P.C., Fred Perry, F-Troupe

2007

Move to Paris continued collaborative line with A.P.C.
Group Exhibition "Accidental Collections" Aram Gallery, London

2006

A/W 06-07 show "Annabella" London Fashion Week catwalk show
Collaboration with CA4LA Own line hat collection
Collaboration with F-Troupe Own line footwear collection
New line with Fred Perry "Jessica Ogden/Fred Perry" Womenswear line. Launches September 2006

2005

A/W 05-06 show "Les Jumelles" London Fashion Week catwalk show
S/S 06 show "On The Shore" London Fashion Week catwalk show
Collaboration with Fred Perry "Blank Canvas" Capsule womenswear collection. Launches May 2006
Collaboration with sculptor Tomoaki Suzuki St Martin-in-the-Fields Church, Trafalgar Square, London

2004

A/W 04-05 show "When I Was Seven" London Fashion Week presentation
S/S 05 show "Keita's Stripes" London Fashion Week catwalk show
New Line with A.P.C. "Madras" Capsule womenswear collection. Launches May 2006

2003

A/W 03-04 show "After Midnite" London Fashion Week presentation
S/S 04 show "Liz's House" London Fashion Week catwalk show
New Line with A.P.C. "A.P.C. Enfant" Childrenswear line

2002

A/W 02-03 show "Whisper" London Fashion Week presentation
S/S 03 show "Dusty Days" London Fashion Week catwalk show
Collaboration with Liberty Own line collection utilising classic Liberty prints

2001

A/W 01-02 show "Conversations" London Fashion Week presentation
S/S 02 show "Threads That Tie" London Fashion Week presentation
Collaboration with A.P.C. "JO Custom" Customising Garments from their line
Solo Exhibition "My Favourite Dresses" British Council, Prague
Group Exhibitions "Jam 2000" Barbican, London & Tokyo
"Radicals at Mode Fashion 2001" Antwerp
"Dead - The Welfare State" The Roundhouse, London
"Fanric of Fashion" Crafts Council, London, Helsinki, Copenhagen & Ghent

2000

A/W 00-01 show "Meander/Wander" Installation show, London
S/S 01 show "Flutter" First London Fashion Week presentation
Consultant Designer with Manderina Duck Womenswear & accessories
Group Exhibition "Best of British Fashion" Design Museum/Arts Council, London

1999

S/S 00 show "Glimpse" installation show, London
Group Exhibition "Lost & Found" British Council, London, Germany, France, Belgium & Russia

1998

S/S 99 show "A Dozen Dresses" Installation at Pineal Eye, London

1994-6

Work with Oxfam's NoLogo project Customising garments