

North Kent Embroiderers

At our last meeting members welcomed Elitta Fell www.mouseline.co.uk to speak to us. Elitta is a silk painter and watercolourist, who was formerly a graphic designer, but who explored various crafts—including mosaics and rag rug making—before discovering silk painting, which marked the start of a new chapter in her career.

As an introduction to her talk, Elitta gave us a brief history of silk making. Archaeologists have found silk thread and spinning tools that are between six thousand and seven thousand years old, with China claiming to be the first to use silk threads. The silkworms from where the silk comes, feed exclusively on leaves from the white-berried mulberry tree. China kept silk production secret for two thousand years, until the process eventually began in Japan. The ancient Silk Road opened up the highly profitable silk trade with Europe.

Each silkworm produces one thousand yards of continuous thread, but sadly in commercial production the cocoon is boiled in the process of unwinding the thread. If, as in the wild, the grub is allowed to eat its way out of the silk cocoon, then the short lengths of silk thread have to be joined to make a continuous length. The resulting woven fabric is less smooth. Scientists have long tried to copy the beauty of woven silk and have even made a silk like product using spider's webs and also from (genetically modified) goat's milk.

Elitta mainly uses chiffon weight silk material as it allows the dyes to be absorbed fully on both the back and front of the material. There are two kinds of products which Elitta uses in silk painting. Gutta is used to make outlines of her design on the silk and dyes are then added. The gutta prevents the colours from merging. Coloured gutta remains on the material, but clear gutta can be removed to leave an empty white line as part of the design. To set the paint, heat is needed. There are a variety of methods, including steaming, using a hairdryer or an iron.

Elitta told us about the various finishes that can be applied to the wet dye e.g. salt will absorb some of the colour and create less dark areas, giving a mottled effect. Alcohol drops will remove the colour altogether. One method is to mix water and vinegar, drop on to the dye, then wrap the silk over your hand to secure some folds before putting the bundle (without your hand!) into the microwave. This creates a tie dye effect.

Japanese shibori is another technique Elitta uses to make her designs. Silk can be wrapped around wood or folded tightly and clamped before dyeing. To make silk pictures, a lightweight iron on Vilene is used to back the silk.

Elitta had brought some beautiful examples of her work for us to see.

We are also promised a 'Have a Go' session later in the year for members to try painting on silk.

We are continuing the challenge of producing an embroidered 'postcard' to swap with another member who has undertaken the challenge. The theme for our postcards this month was 'Mountains'. You can see some here.

Thank you, Evelyn, for taking notes and for



Veronica for taking a photo in my absence.

If you would maybe like to start a new hobby and to join our group or would just like to find out a bit more about us then please pay us a visit - look at our website <https://northkentembroiderers.co.uk/>

or email us at: info@northkentembroiderers.co.uk or contact our Chairman,

Eileen on 01474 324734 Happy stitching, Karen

