

THE RED DRESS

The most frequently asked questions to Kirstie (creator of the Red Dress project).

Who are you, and what is your story with embroidery?

I am an artist, yogi and mother based just outside Glastonbury in Somerset, UK. My art practice is centred around textiles, but often in unusual ways. I have a particular interest in embroidery, and its diversity and potential as a means of communication (or subversion), its history and practice throughout the world both as an art form and in daily life and the repetitive, meditative and healing effects experienced through its creation.

How did the idea for the Red Dress come to you?

I have a fascination with different cultures (having grown up in various far-flung countries) and had a desire to create a piece of work that would unite and bring together different identities and voices from around the world, without borders and prejudice. A project that would invite connection and seek to provide a platform for voices to be shared.

Did you stitch on it too?

Yes, there are lots of pieces embroidered by me on the dress, most are small additions to mark a particular event or moment in time. I also created the spiders web on the bodice back...which was couched, so as not to pin down the embroidery underneath.

Who made the Red Dress?

Myself and my teacher / talented dressmaker called Gail Falconer, who I worked with for many years when I lived in London. Gail helped me create several high impact dresses for both installation art, performance, and personal commissions.

The skirt has been reassembled 4 times over the 12 years, and the bodice twice - to incorporate all the new commissions, and make sure the overall composition remained balanced.

I was keen for the design of the dress to be strong and empowered (you'll see various military type lines on the bodice shoulders) but also retain feminine curves. The inside of the bodice is boned like a corset so when you wear the dress you feel very regal!

Why RED?

You can't ignore red! I also love the strength of red, and its feeling of love, passion, anger, blood...these are all part of our human experience and felt very fitting for a strong feminine voice.

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How was the project created, organized? Who did what? How were the embroiderers contacted?

Aside from Gail helping me make the dress and Sylvia De Gregorio helping sew it together, it has just been me working on the Red Dress throughout - alongside other paid work and being a mum. The process has evolved over the years, as it's needed to fit around my life and commitments...with most of it happening on my computer!

Sometimes I feel a bit like an octopus trying to keep so many balls in the air – from events, press and exhibitions to documentation, shipping, transport, social media, website, presentations, merchandise, cataloguing and maintaining the Red Dress...I've learnt a lot of new skills on the way!

Finding the artisans was an organic process - using contacts I had from the art / textile world, through friends and family, the internet and social media. Budget didn't allow for me to travel with the dress each time, so instead panels of the garment were sent out to willing artisans to stitch onto and then send back to me in the UK.

Practically: did you send the dress to everyone? Or pieces of cloth?

In most cases panels of the fabric were sent out, as the dress is too valuable (and expensive) to send. I did manage to get to Sinai, Mexico and most recently Kosovo with the whole dress, which was wonderful!

The only instructions to the artisans were to create an embroidered piece that communicated an element of their own identity and culture – something they would like to share about themselves...a story they would like to tell. The artisans all used their own threads and chose their own colour palette and stitch type...which adds a huge amount of interest and diversity to the dress.

Are there any special moments or stories you'd like to share?

Yes! So many, here a few:

1. Showing the Mexican artisans the Red Dress in their homes up in the mountains of Chiapas, and being able to experience their lives for a few days was a real privilege.
2. Exhibiting the Red Dress in Podujëve, Kosovo and watching the 2 Sister Stitch artisans Feride & Fatime Hallili meeting their Mayor and being interviewed on TV.
3. Being invited to the Kosovan Parliament to meet the incredible Deputy head of Parliament Saranda Bogujevci, who then wore the Red Dress!
4. The Red Dress being awarded first prize at the *Premier Valcellina Textiles Award* in Maniago, Italy in 2005.
5. Otherwise each time I receive an embroidery back in the post. It is the most wonderful experience – being able to touch and hold the cloth the artisans have put so much of their energy into. Such a privilege.