The Dementia Darnings

“Each stitch goes towards evoking presence” Marion Mitchell

The series known as the Dementia Darnings developed from my mother’s interest and joy in looking through family photo albums. She was diagnosed with dementia in 2011 and as my role as carer increased it seems only possible to continue my practice by making her and our situation the subject of my work. She enjoyed having me around, watching me curiously when I occasionally brought the canvases to her house to work on. I was amazed by her reaction, her engagement with the process given her deteriorating memory.

My background is in fine art, rather than fibre based. I developed the images in a way similar to making a cross hatched drawing, by sewing through fine bobinette netting stretched over a canvas. It is a slow, meditative process. Each one can take up to three or four months to complete.

The series grew as my mother went into a nursing home. As I relinquished her care to other people, I became an observer. I continued to make the work which had now become about universal ageing, about time passing and about documenting her decline due to the development of dementia. I began to separate each length of of the tapestry wool into its individual strands, ironing them to remove the kinks. This finer yarn helped to convey her gentle frailty. She died peacefully in 2015.

The Dementia Darnings have travelled extensively in the U.K. and Europe, and a selection reached China in 2018. I can be contacted via my website www.jennidutton.com

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