

The artist wishes to acknowledge the generous support of:

Dr. Caroline Jordan
Research Fellow
The Australian Centre
University of Melbourne

Dianna Wells Design
catalogue design

Alan Mann & Loris Button
University of Ballarat School of Art

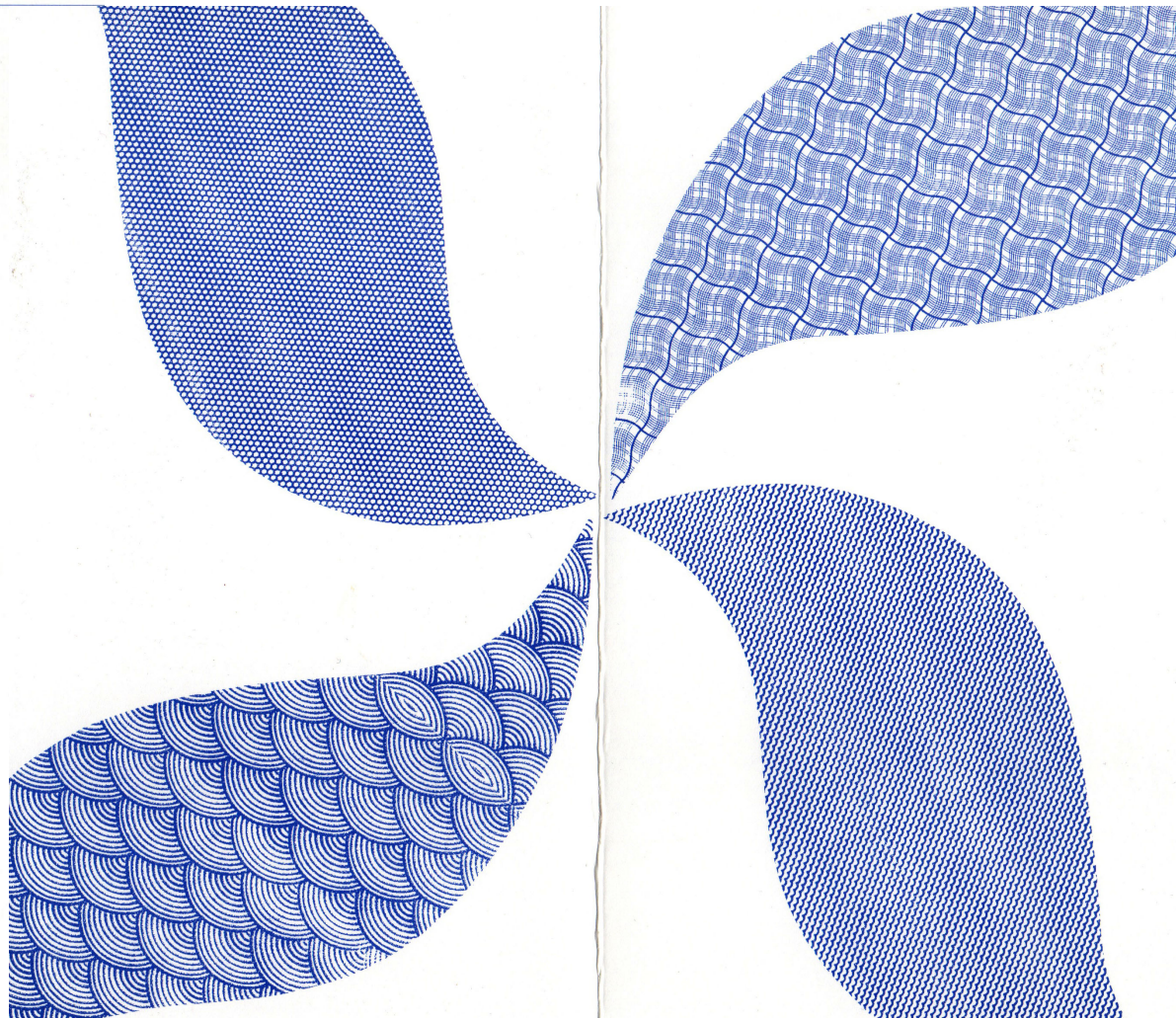
Michael McMahon

Tim Craker

Colin & Rory Alexander

Win Parkes

All those friends & family who hoarded envelopes for this installation



LINDEN
St. Kilda Centre for Contemporary Arts

OPENING
6 – 8pm Friday 19 October

EXHIBITION
19 October – 11 November
26 Acland Street, St Kilda 3182

GALLERY
Tues – Sun 1 – 6pm
T 03 92096560

OFFICE
Mon – Fri 10am – 6pm
T 03 9209 6794
F 03 9525 4607
email info@lindenarts.org
website www.lindenarts.org

LOUISE SAXTON

envelop AN INSTALLATION

My work is largely process-oriented - the making of the work drives the journey.

Louise Saxton's process is governed by an ethos of salvage that she likens to that of the traditional quilt-maker. In a pre-consumer era of domestic frugality, precious scraps of patterned textiles were hoarded, re-cut and painstakingly re-configured by hand into objects of beauty and use. For generations, this ingenious recycling was the principal creative outlet of women whose opportunities rarely extended beyond the domestic.

To arrive at the installation, *envelop*, Saxton has translated the principles guiding this way of working – a meticulous ordering and a horror of waste – into a contemporary idiom. In a disposable consumer culture, there is no longer any driving need to conserve and recycle scraps of materials for reasons of economy or scarcity. In this context, Saxton's instinct to retrieve objects of aesthetic value out of the stream of throwaway 'rubbish' encountered in everyday life becomes a perverse and deliberate choice.

envelop evolved out of Saxton's admiration for the nostalgic textile-like quality of the blue-and-white patterned linings found in many cheap mass-produced envelopes. A large number of these linings were hoarded from her daily correspondence. At first, Saxton's labours of reclamation and transformation were directed towards stabilising the flimsy paper and poor inks into something more precious and substantial. The ephemeral envelopes were fused onto expensive rag paper and 'quilted' with embossed lace. The

paper was then form-cut and arranged into repetitive geometric designs. True to the discipline imposed by the salvage ethos, the negative shapes left by the cut-outs were set aside for another artwork.

Composition of the piece followed the production of the motif. Saxton wanted to liberate the units or motifs from the traditional containment of the grid. By choosing installation, she was able to set them out in flexible configurations which could respond spontaneously to the exhibition space. *I like the idea of taking the geometry of the quilt and letting it roam across the wall.* In letting the motif wander, migrate and colonise architectural spaces, the artist intended a playful but deliberate trespass of a gendered kind. *In installation there is a close dialogue with what could be seen as the 'masculine' public space of the gallery. My work brings domestic craft traditions deliberately into that space.*

At Linden, the 19th century mansion, the effect is to draw attention to the double-gendered connotations of what was formerly a domestic space, albeit a grand one. *envelop* invites the viewer to contemplate the ambiguities of the public/private inherent in the nature of the space, as well as those provoked by the externalisation of the usually enclosed materials in the work itself.

envelop also invokes cross-cultural exchange, but in a similarly oblique way. The original cross-cultural encounter was serendipitous, like the 'discovery' of the envelope linings. Saxton came across an illustrated article, torn from a tourist magazine, on

the 16th century Rüstem Paşa mosque in Istanbul. The article showed a lavishly ornamented and tiled interior. For the artist, the decorative tiling evoked metaphors of quilting and textiles. *I saw a blue-and-white clothed space – completely quilted in decorative tiles.* The cut form Saxton subsequently adopted for the blue-and-white envelope linings is the Rumi scroll or arabesque, characteristic of Ottoman tiles and featured in sections of the soaring Rüstem Paşa interior.

For Saxton, the high-ceilinged interiors of Linden provided a remote echo of the mosque architecture, perhaps not least because Victorian architects borrowed freely from a wide range of exotic sources, including the Ottoman, for their inspiration. The circle of reference was reinforced by the patterns of some of the envelope linings themselves. Although in debased and anonymous form, these patterns are equally cross-cultural in their application, being found in many Islamic, Japanese and Western decorative traditions.

envelop delicately probes the dichotomies posed between craft/art, domestic/public, disposable/valuable, male/female, Orient and Occident in its layers and cultural cross-references. In Louise Saxton's thoughtful process, order and restraint is juxtaposed with the potential for freedom and mutation. As a result, *envelop* seems to offer an ideal space in which differences are suspended and power is, temporarily, held in balance.

Caroline Jordan
September 2001