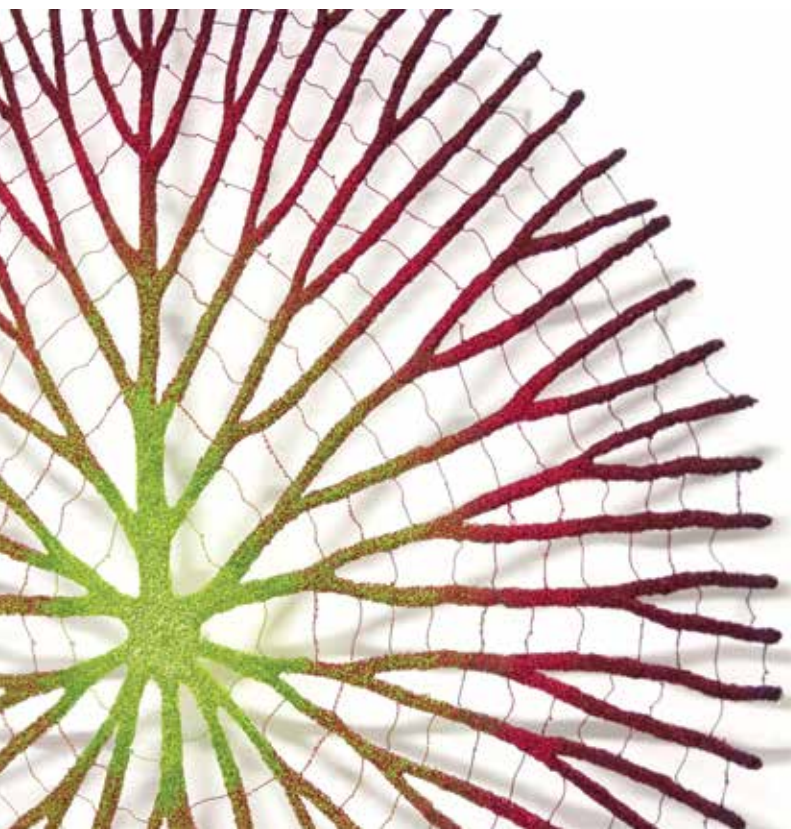




Meredith Woolnough: CREATING THE WORLD ANEW

BY JAMIE "MR. X STITCH" CHALMERS



MEREDITH WOOLNOUGH'S ARTWORK WILL ASTOUND YOU. Vibrant colored structures of organic shapes hover effortlessly above the surface, elegant and enchanting. At first glance, they look like strange scientific specimens. However, closer inspection reveals a painstaking production process that elevates the work to another level. Through the use of machine embroidery and soluble materials, Meredith is creating the world anew.

"I have always been fascinated by the delicate structures one can find in natural forms and this fascination manifested itself in my

artwork a few years ago. I started with basic coral patterns; creating a series of small circular embroidered pieces that were each inspired by a different species of coral."

These early pieces started Meredith on her creative path, refining a technique that is quite unique. Using the simplest setting on her sewing machine, Meredith uses a freehand technique to carefully draw her images, covering water-soluble fabric with tiny layers. As these layers are applied, the flat image is transformed into a three-dimensional shape and when the base layer is dissolved, the finished effect is quite remarkable.

TOP OF PAGE: **Ginkgo Biloba** (detail) 2014; embroidery thread and pins on paper; 108 x 94 cm. LEFT: **Amazonian Water Lily** (detail); 2014; embroidery thread and pins on paper; 69 x 69 cm. TOP RIGHT: **Red Cabbage**; 2014; embroidery thread and pins on paper; 94 x 94 cm. RIGHT: **Embroidered Red Bowl**; 2014.



Meredith takes direct reference from physical specimens when creating new pieces, taking care to examine and understand the construction of the subject. Besides using high-resolution pictures, which allow a great level of detail, Meredith sketches the specimens to determine the direction of her embroidered design.

"The more I work with natural forms, the more I find myself drawn into the science of nature—the way things are built, the way they grow and function. I often find myself marvelling at the perfection of a single leaf or the phenomenal beauty of a coral reef and it can be quite overwhelming at times—almost spiritual."

To present the work, Meredith has developed a mounting technique using pins on a backing board that

makes her work float above the surface. The creation of shadow adds to the organic effect, evoking memories of scientific study and museum objects. It's a unique method of display, only possible because of the transparent nature of her work, and it adds to the magic of each installation.

Meredith graduated from University of New South Wales with a Fine Arts degree and has exhibited across Australia. As her artistic career evolves, so does her work, and Meredith continues to push at the boundaries of this form. As a result of winning a 2014 Emerging Artist award from Craft NSW, she produced a series of delicate bowls whose construction appears closer to 3D printing than embroidery. Yet it is not just the small and intricate world that is in Meredith's focus:





"I have been working with the technique for almost a decade now and I'm constantly finding new ways to refine my approach and push the limits of the technique. Although it's a very labor-intensive process it is a labor of love... I am constantly pushing the limits of scale with the work and have started doing some larger installation-based pieces that are installed directly onto the gallery wall."

Whether it's the vibrant orange of the *Ammonite* or the graduated effect in the *Amazonian Water Lily*, Meredith's work creates a tension between the seemingly organic creation and the artificially enhanced color scheme. You are pulled between accepting them as organic and being astonished at their synthetic construction, and in doing you gain a further appreciation of the magnificence of nature.

In the world of machine-embroidered art, Meredith's work stands apart from the rest. Many might seek to emulate Meredith's

technique, but her artistry and skills place her in a class of her own and there is no doubt that she is on the ascent. The delicate application of the simplest of stitches has been used to create wondrous artworks that revere the beauty of life itself and inspire us to rejoice at the world we live in.

Jamie "Mr. X Stitch" Chalmers has been dubbed the Kingpin of Contemporary Embroidery. Since 2008, his website (www.mrxstitch.com) has showcased contemporary embroidery and needlecraft from around the world, taking the subject seriously, but not too seriously. He's nicer than he looks, which is fortunate.



ABOVE: **Golden Ginkgo Square**; 2014; embroidery thread and pins on paper; 70 x 70 cm.
RIGHT: **Ammonite**; 2015; embroidery thread and pins on paper; 94 x 98 cm.

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