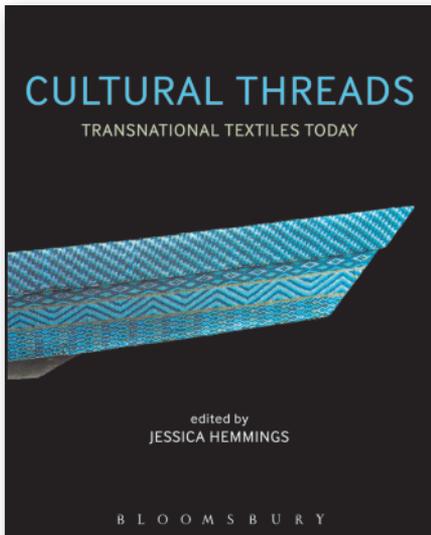


Reviewed by Lycia Trouton

***Cultural Threads:
Transnational Textiles Today***

Edited by Jessica Hemmings
Bloomsbury, London and New York, 2015
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Cultural Threads: Transnational Textiles Today sits comfortably between the mainstream and The Academe, occupying an intriguing intersection between worlds and migration stories, where textile arts seem to sit so well. The publication is the latest in a steady output from Jessica Hemmings



since the award of her PhD in 2006. The cross-cultural traditional-craft-with-contemporary-fine-art premise of the book is suggested, metaphorically, by its striking cover image of *Inga* (2001), a blue-hued wooden boat by Jorge Lizarazo and Hechizoo weaving studios. Beautiful illustrations of artwork from The Global South (the collective nations of Africa, Central/Latin

America, and parts of Asia) are featured throughout the manuscript.

I attended the book launch recently at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts, London, accompanied by a day-long symposium of noteworthy international speakers, most of whom were chapter writers. Hemmings' introductory remarks privileged the image of *Inga*. This contemporary beaded artwork, made from an Indigenous Colombian canoe, is a newly constructed hybrid that indirectly references the international narcotics trade. As a writer of craft production theory, Hemmings enjoys playing with how these socio-political-economic juxtapositions and crafts persons, or their collectives, carefully negotiate 'glocal' circumstances. These lives are involved in producing alluringly decorative surface designs and art that oftentimes hide serious cultural challenges or losses within the face of globalization and rampant homogeneous consumerism. Through the various articles and easy-read interviews with artists,

Cultural Threads deliberates cultural connotations and tensions in material creations.

Hemmings' background includes an MA from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, and a childhood lived partly in Indonesia. Her commentary reveals not only a career, but a life-time grounded in postcolonial issues and literary theory. Unlike her more academic textbook *The Textile Reader* (Berg, 2012), the *Cultural Threads* readership is general. This soft-cover, coffee-table-sized book is skillfully designed with large format eye-catching imagery—fashion, sculpture, performance pieces, and detailed prints. Hemmings is never afraid to cover the socio-political subtext underlying the beauty in textile arts, figures that reveal a dark side of forced migration, colonization, violence, and grief.

Hemmings' array of contributors and their differing preoccupations with certain conceptual practices and fabrics (together with their economic histories and colonial baggage) is impressive. The book covers domestic cross-stitch with Elaine Reichek, US; weave patterns from Ghana with Mamle Kabu; post-slavery cotton from Lubaina Himid, with Sabine Broeck and Alice Schmid; Maori flax/linen patterns (Margaret White and Damian Skinner); and social-practice public art in Brixton, London, UK, and Bosnia/Herzegovina (with Françoise Dupré) to name just a few.

Hemmings contributes two chapters as well as an extensive introduction. The idea of beauty features centrally in the concept of this book on fabric arts and is inherent within its colorful pages of artwork. In the words of Lubaina Himid on the subject of slavery in Chapter 8, "...because the subject [matter] is already ugly...I would dispute the notion of beauty...It's rather an ability to know how to make people stop long enough near the work to...see themselves in it...But it isn't the beauty of a nineteenth century painting." The book broadly explores fabric arts, from postcolonial trade and its implications for both human drudgery and creativity, to ways of making contemporary art. Collectively, such a text can develop new art audiences excited for the worlds of surface design and textile arts within, or despite, the production and circulation of globalized fine arts.

Lycia Trouton's article about the *Cultural Threads* book launch and symposium at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts, London (February 15, 2015) will be posted on SDA NewsBlog in April 2015; surfacedesign.org/newsblog.

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