

Jan Garside 'Craft's in my heart'

Texture and colour thrill weaver Jan Garside who is the fifth contender in our exciting Talent Around Britain award

FEATURE CAROLINE WHEATER
PHOTOGRAPHS SYLVAINÉ POITAU

'Everything about weaving is traditional, but you can make contemporary pieces,' says Jan Garside as she unwraps a selection of woven, silken wall hangings from tissue paper. The finishes are scintillating – nubbly, filigreed, glossy – and in the softest, muted colours of green, grey, blue and white. 'They're the colours of the sea,' explains Jan, 'with the ripples on the surface and the weeds and currents below.'

The sea has been her signature since she studied textiles as a mature student seven years ago – an achievement that still thrills her. 'I was a midwife for years, and a teacher before that, but there was always something in me that felt unfulfilled,' she recalls. After completing an Access to Higher Education course, the equivalent to an art foundation, Jan applied to Loughborough University, a well-respected centre for textile design. 'I took a leap of faith. I'd never tried sewing, but I like to work intuitively and it's amazing to make something new by starting with just one thread.'

The first year was tough. 'The teachers were hard on us to see who would stick it out, but it was a good grounding.' Students began by working on basic treadle looms, translating drawings and paintings into pieces of fabric. In the second, they moved to giant dobby looms,



TOOLS OF A TEXTILE MAKER

Jan works at her dobby loom at home in Nottinghamshire and, below, the shuttles that help her weave her magic

enabling them to make larger, more complicated pieces. It was when Jan was preparing for her graduation show that she began to feel everything coming together.

'As you weave you can't see what you're doing, so it's nerve-racking when you take the piece off. I took my warp [the cloth top to bottom; the weft is the thread that goes from side to side] off and it was exactly as I had hoped. For me that was the start of what weaving could be.'

Since graduating in 2002, Jan has clattered away on her own dobby loom at home in Nottinghamshire, creating textiles for galleries and shows, and taking private commissions. From January 2003–2005, she was selected for the Crafts Council Next Move scheme at Manchester Metropolitan University. This gave her opportunities to use free facilities, receive funding and do a little teaching, all of which proved invaluable. Her approach to her work is meticulous and she chooses only ▷