

COCKPIT ARTS 3

Beatrice Larkin

- *Weaver*



Beatrice Larkin is a textile designer specialising in weave. She combines traditional Dobby weaving with the capabilities of the computerised Jacquard loom to create her distinctive geometric designs. With a keen focus on British craftsmanship, Beatrice designs and samples her textiles in her studio, before sending them off to be woven by a specialist mill in Lancashire. In 2015 the Campaign for Wool chose her as one of its 'Incrediwools', alongside Donna Wilson and Ally Capellino. She has exhibited at the Heal's Modern Craft Market and sold to Conran Interiors, and sells her work online through Daylesford Organic.

Beatrice graduated from the Royal College of Arts in 2013 with a collection of woven blankets and throws and a portfolio full of designs. She started exhibiting and selling her work around London and was accepted onto the Craft Council's Hot House scheme for emerging makers in the same year. In Spring 2014 she travelled to India and spent six weeks teaching fashion and textiles at The International Institute of Fine Arts outside Delhi.

On her return, she applied for the Cockpit Arts/ The Worshipful Company of Clothworkers' Award and was accepted onto the scheme in July 2014. This provided her with a subsidised studio space with access to three large looms in Cockpit's Deptford incubator. "Cockpit Arts had been on my radar since my time at Chelsea and the RCA," Beatrice explains. "[Cockpit weaver] Sophie Manners went to Chelsea and the RCA and I'd previously worked with the printer Camilla Meyer [also at Cockpit]. It's a small world!"

Beatrice threw herself into life at Cockpit, and by the autumn of that year she was exhibiting at Southwark Cathedral during Wool Week. It was here that she met and began a relationship with Daylesford Organic, a large organic farm and shop that champions sustainable produce. It was the perfect fit for Beatrice's products. Daylesford now retail one of her blankets online and she is currently in talks with them to extend this range.



Although Beatrice trained in traditional weave techniques, she realised early on at Cockpit that she wanted her blankets to be manufactured in small production runs. This meant designing and sampling would be carried out in house, with the actual weaving taking place in small, dedicated mills in the UK. Combined with the fact that she was commuting to Deptford from her home in Islington, she therefore asked Cockpit if she could move her studio to their Holborn incubator in central London. "Cockpit were amazing," she enthuses. "They said I could have a space in Holborn and still use the looms in Deptford. Hand weaving is not my main focus any more, but it's really good to keep my hand in, as it's frustrating to be in front of a computer all day. The Clothworkers group work on a rota in two to three week slots, so we all get to share the looms."

Beatrice moved to Holborn in July 2015, and now uses her studio as an office. When asked if she wouldn't be better off saving on rent and working from home, she is emphatic. "I had a year working at home and I really hated it," she says. "I love being around other makers. It's just nice knowing that they're there; it's much harder to motivate yourself at home." Besides, she says, you wouldn't get the business support. "In order to justify the expense of my studio, I try to get as much as I can out of the business advice on offer here."

Over the last two years, Beatrice has found the support on offer at Cockpit particularly important for helping her create and implement her very specific business model. She has used the one-to-one coaching sessions with David Crump, Head of Business Development, and Business Development Manager Madeleine Furness to work out her costings and what she refers to as a "personal survival income" - in other words, understanding the basics of how to survive on a craft income. "Costing my product is hard," she admits. "I want my blankets to be made in small production runs, woven in British mills and available to buy in stores and used in people's homes; it's a luxury, but an accessible one."

She is in the process of developing a core range of blankets, a plan that received a real boost earlier last year when she was awarded the Jill Humphrey's Springboard Prize. She plans to use the money to produce five new designs, all in monochrome. "I'm hoping to launch this at a trade show very soon!" she says enthusiastically. The money will also go towards a photoshoot and look book to show to potential buyers. "The aim is to build relationships with new stockists," she explains. "I will also have a shop on my website and focus more on direct selling."

The Business Development Team at Cockpit has been supporting her throughout this process, helping her to apply for extra funding. "David has been helping me to write my business plan as part of the application for the Cockpit Arts/Ingenious Growth Loan Fund," she says. The Team also introduced Beatrice to manufacturing specialist Nigel Rust who advised her on production timescales and testing fabrics, as well as giving her a list of potential manufacturers to contact.

Beatrice admits that the whole process of setting up her business has been slower than she had anticipated, and she is still working part time in order to make ends meet. But she is hopeful that with this increased support and funding, she will soon be able to concentrate fully on the business.



www.beatricelarkin.com

Photos: www.aluncallender.com