

Working from landscape: Identifying the narrative

Led by Joan Baxter



Hallaig. Woven by Joan Baxter

In this workshop we will explore different design strategies for tapestry, using the surrounding South Downs landscapes as inspiration.

This landscape is a treasure trove of human history, geology and ecology and these factors inform its particular colours, textures, forms and qualities of light.

Each participant should try to do some initial research in advance of the class, so they have some idea of which aspects of the landscape they might like to focus on. This could take the form of google searches and looking at maps if you don't know the landscape or don't live nearby, or it could be exploratory walks or visits to some of the many archaeological sites along the Downs. This doesn't need to be much, it's simply a starting point.

We have designed this workshop to run over two weekends so that students can spend some time in between, distilling and refining material found and samples started, and to formulate more

questions to ask or avenues to pursue further.

Throughout the first session - the afternoon of the 31st March, then full days on 1st and 2nd April - we will concentrate on research to help us build our personal response to the landscape. This will take the form of being out in the landscape and working in the studio on designs and samples. I will also deliver a PowerPoint lecture on my own approaches to designing during this session.

I'd like us to get out into the landscape together on the Friday afternoon, but this will to a certain extent be weather dependant. This activity is designed to start participants off on researching visual and other aspects of the surrounding landscape that will ultimately contribute towards their designs. This might include sketching, taking photographs, collecting objects such as stones, flowers or twigs, or it might simply be walking and observing.



Looking east along the Downs towards the Devil's Dyke, Sussex. (Wikipedia CC)

The 'narrative' in the title of this class is the story that weavers tell themselves about their subject matter, as they are weaving. In my view this is what makes for a visually satisfying and emotionally engaging tapestry. In the second session – 8th and 9th April - we will be working on how we create our own narrative in a small tapestry or a series of samples for a larger tapestry from our research.

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About the tutor

Joan Baxter has been a professional tapestry weaver and teacher for more than 35 years. She studied tapestry at Edinburgh College of Art and Warsaw Academy of Fine Art and worked as a Studio weaver in the UK and Australia before setting up on her own in 1987. She lives in the far North of Scotland amongst the landscapes that inspire much of her work. She exhibits her work nationally and internationally and runs Masterclasses in the UK, Denmark, Canada and the US.

What to bring:

- Sketchbook, drawing materials, camera.
- Preliminary research materials about aspects of the South Downs, images, maps, stories, photographs etc.
- Weaving frame and bobbins (these can also be provided)
- Scissors
- Any of your own yarn you think you might like to use, although the full range of weaversbazaar 18/2 and 7/2 yarns will be available to use during the class.
- Your preferred warp or weaversbazaar warp which will be available in class
- Comfortable walking shoes and waterproof jacket for working outside.



The dip slope of the South Downs, as seen from Angmering Park Estate near Arundel (Wikipedia CC)

Notes and resources

As a starting point for any personal research on the South Downs, we have put together a few ideas and suggestions which we hope are helpful.

Wikipedia article on the South Downs

This provides a very useful overview of the whole area of the South Downs from several perspectives. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Downs

Wikivoyage article on the South Downs

https://en.wikivoyage.org/wiki/South_Downs#Q584108

Sussex South Downs Guide

Details of all the exciting things to see and do on the South Downs.

<http://www.sussex-southdowns-guide.com/>

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Folk Tales of the South Downs

A study of myths and legends across Sussex and the South Downs has revealed that areas within the National Park could be home to 80 per cent more fairies and a third more ghosts than the average across East and West Sussex. It also reveals that there could be almost twice as much magical treasure buried beneath the protected landscape. <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/ghosts-and-fairies-in-the-south-downs/> and <http://www.sussexfolktalecentre.org/2015/07/02/a-graph-of-folktales-in-sussex-and-the-south-downs/>

Highdown Gardens

Nestled on the South Downs just a short distance east of Angmering, these are spectacular chalk-soil gardens. <http://www.highdowngardens.co.uk/index.html>

Highdown Hill

Very close to Highdown Gardens and a traditional burial place for the Kings of Wessex, is this location on a highpoint of the Downs. A bronze and Iron Age settlement, it is also the site of an Anglo-Saxon cemetery.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Highdown_Hill

Angmering Mills

There have been a number of mills in the Angmering area, taking advantage of the height of the Downs and the prevailing winds. The names of Roundstone Lane and Roundstone Pub, in Angmering, are attributed to folk tales of millers rolling mill wheels down the hills.

<http://www.angmeringvillage.co.uk/history/windmills.htm>

Angmering Village

Dating back to Roman times, Angmering Village has a long and rich history. Details of this can be found at the Angmering Village website> **History centre – over 200 pages of fact and folk lore! <http://www.angmeringvillage.co.uk/>