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# Contextual Information for REF2021

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Lee Lapthorne

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The Love Settle and The Bard's Rest

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Output identifier: LL01

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**Ravensbourne**  
University London

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# Output and Description

The output comprises two artefacts commissioned by Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (SBT), on display between 8 March and 19 September 2019 at Anne Hathaway's Cottage and Hall's Croft (the home of Shakespeare's daughter Susanna), Stratford-upon-Avon, UK.



Fig. 1: The Bard's Rest, Hall's Croft



Fig. 2: The Love Settle, Anne Hathaway's Cottage

I was invited to visit and research The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (SBT) world-class museum and archive collection. My commission was to create 2 unique and innovative pieces of furniture that will be showcased at Anne Hathaway's Cottage and Hall's Croft, the home of Shakespeare's daughter Susanna, in Stratford-upon-Avon.

I set out to inspire a new generation of textile designers and bring Shakespeare's work to life to a new audience through my innovative and unique approach to multimedia textile techniques.

My work is innovative in its methodology in creating a multi-disciplinary approach to fabric manipulation with hand printed, painted, embroidered, embellishment, devoré, discharge, fringing, digital prints, with embroidery and sequins. Never before has a textiles artist used upholstery and furniture as a vehicle to showcase the breath and diversity of a historical archive in 3D relief and engineered landscaped

freezes.

It was a real privilege to have access to the Trust's extensive collections, a rich and vast treasure trove of over 17,000 Shakespeare-related items. I was especially drawn to the colours in the 250 year-old Garrick Jubilee rosette, which was commissioned for the very first festival in Shakespeare's honour, and is widely celebrated in his hometown of Stratford every year since. I was also inspired by the pieces within the archive that related to this festival to determine the original colour palette that I could modernise and use throughout my process.

My process includes photographing key pieces from the archive, then in turn making observation drawings, studying painting textures, then digital printing these elements to finally add depth by hand screen printing and overlaying 3Dimensional embroidery.

I spent many hours photographing and documenting artefacts that hadn't been showcased for many years. I've studied in depth and hand drew many pieces that I had selected. Observational drawing enabled me to gather information on how these pieces were handcrafted. I also worked in a graphical way, gathering my photographs and images and manipulating them digitally ready to be printed. Once I had these complex images digitally printed onto fabric I then start layering them further by screen printing and embellishing the fabrics.

I searched for two appropriate pieces of furniture that would model my fabrics. It was important that these pieces of furniture had a connection to the environment and space where they would be exhibited. The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust were keen for me to push the expectations of their visitors and referenced Tracey Emin 'My Bed' work as a benchmark.

Having visited Hampton Court in London I met with an outdoor furniture supplier Mygind design who specialized in historical made outdoor loungers which would be ideal for the Love seat to be sited at Anne Hathaways Cottage. This unique outdoor furniture that offered a robust two seater private experience for lovers was perfect.

I wanted to find a piece of 21st Century furniture that is a fashionable addition to the homes of today's interior trend followers, due to the fact that it would juxtapose against the backdrop of Halls Croft. I researched celebrated furniture makers in London and discovered Greaves and Thomas.

I purchased a vintage preloved piece by Greaves and Thomas. A three seater sofa bed that I set about reupholstering over a 3-month period.

I had no experience of upholstery or working 3 dimensionally and therefore this would be a challenge. Each texture and image had been inspired by the archives.

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# Research Narrative

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## Funding

This project was commissioned by the Arts Council England for £15K. I was invited by SBT to support their application which was focused on my work in particular.

On 9th March 2019, at Hall's Croft in Stratford-upon-Avon I exclusively unveiled the commissioned pieces as part of the Trust's *After Hours* programme attended by 30 paying guests, followed by a Q&A discussing new ways of reinventing old pieces of furniture and textiles to create something unique – cited as an inspiring event for the creatively curious. The Arts Council England were also in attendance and reviewed the talk. The evening event was an intense 1.5 hours of listening, learning, and looking.

The artistic and quality assessment report from the Arts Council England concluded:

The artwork produced:

**Excellence:** *it is one of the best examples of its type that I have seen;*

**Risk:** *the artists/curators really challenged themselves;*

**Distinctiveness:** *it was different from things I've experienced before;*

**The event: Enthusiasm:** *I would come to something like this again;*

**Local impact:** *it is important that it's happening here.*

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## Introduction

The SBT was new to commissioning artists and therefore my approach was new to the trust. It became obvious that many of the scholars and experts working at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust weren't used to being interviewed and questioned by a visual artist before. This became evident when I quizzed a few of the archive managers on the creative origin of many of the items. My naivety towards historical pieces and fresh excitement for all things Shakespearean drove my inquisitive nature.

The concept of the creative journey for both pieces of work marries the historical with the contemporary through the use of discovered motifs, textile production methods and the design of the artwork's fabric and my choice of furniture.

During my time at SBT I examined and was inspired by historical artefacts and objects from the collection. I drew sketches, investigated these further and infused them together to create two new interpretations to present my findings in a modern and contemporary manner. For example, I used texts from Shakespeare's plays and rewrote them in abbreviated and text message language leading the viewer to reflect on language and how we communicate with each other today, compared with the past. As the work was intended to be shown to a public audience, I believed this would help the Trust to connect with new and younger audiences, enabling them to connect with the work of Shakespeare and to explore the relevance of his work that still resonates today.

This took the form of two pieces of furniture – The Love Settle which is displayed in the garden of Anne Hathaway's Cottage, and The Bard's Rest – a 1960s style settee reupholstered with specially designed fabric inspired by the mark making of Pierre Solange and embroidered with emblems from objects in SBT's archive.

Both pieces are adorned with fabrics I created by using modern day imagery and text to reflect the historical themes, quotes and emblems from Shakespeare's day. Modern production methods, such as digital printing, add a contemporary twist and are layered with traditional embroidery and beading techniques. The pieces feature a modern interpretation of Shakespeare's quotes, characters from his plays and items from the collection, including the famous Second Best Bed.

My vision was for the new works to be unique in creating a multi-disciplinary approach to fabric manipulation with digital printed fabric, hand printed, painted, embroidered, with embellishment, devoré, discharge, fringing, embroidered and sequined. The Anne Hathaway's cottage piece would have to stand up to over 100,000 visitors sitting on the settle and endure the notorious unpredictable British weather.

I also wanted to create modern pieces of furniture to juxtapose the feeling of their new settings at these famous historical buildings.

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In researching the archives, I was drawn to works that immediately drew my attention, often because of their strong motifs and textures. These pieces are also evocative and have romantic narratives. As my selected items were unpacked for me by the archive assistants, it felt like I was plucking pieces from a bygone era rich with traces of their past and reevoking personal memories of previous owners.

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### **Research Question**

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The archive has never before been explored by a textile artist to produce work that would be installed at their properties owned by Shakespeare. The commission was centered around the use of textiles to introduce and promote the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust archives to a new audience focused on arts and craft aware crowd who are fashion and trend aware.

How can I use archive research to inform my artistic textiles process and produce work that has a narrative, that's engaging and innovative?



## Research Method

I visited and had exclusive access to the staff and archives at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust over a 6-month period during which time I selected items to photograph. I then created a sketchbook of drawings and paintings from these items. I spent several hours working in my textiles studio experimenting and developing textured samples of prints, embellishment and embroidery. I also worked digitally, layering and enhancing the work through graphic design programmes ready to be digitally printed onto fabrics which I then layered and embellished with hand printing, painting and embroidery.

I spent time considering who today enjoys Shakespeare? I focused on visitors to the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, thespians', historians and English scholars and imagining the sort of colours, textures and qualities they would like in a fabric to represent the life and times of the playwright.

In choosing these archive pieces I somehow brought them back to life. One cannot help but wonder who their previous owners were and how they would feel about their treasures being used as inspiration for an embellished contemporary sofa.

I really enjoyed delving deep into the archives to gather visual evidence which has led me to create a unique colour palette. I set about detailing these colours with their associated textures, using many different paints, textiles dyes and mediums to create a modern-interpretation of the rainbow coloured Garrick Jubilee cloth. Working on a deeper level with specialist British weavers in Sudbury over a three month period has resulted in the production of a sophisticated material that embodies the essence of Shakespeare's continuing influence on the world.



Fig. 3: Sketch 1



Fig. 4: Sketch 2

### Collaborators and contemporary designers

My work is unique in the sense that I am using many print techniques with multiple layers. Starting with primary research which includes photographic imagery of artefacts and observational hand drawn images of the archives which are then digitally enhanced and manipulated. These digital collages are then printed onto fabrics to be then embellished with various handprinted techniques. In the case of the bards rest and the love settle I have overlaid various prints. By using a mixture of opaque and water-based textile printing inks the art work has depth. The water-based inks offer a ghost like quality emerging from the background, referring to their time in history. The use of metallic bronze, gold and silver opaque inks reference the precious metals, coins and jewelry. To further enhance the cloth foiling techniques have been applied to further enrich the levels of high quality and status.

Once the printing and surface design was completed to both the Bards Rest and the Love Settle I then worked with renowned and celebrated embroidery artist Karen Nicol who specialises in Irish, Cornelly, Multihead, beading and hand embroidery.

Another renowned textiles artist who I researched was Nigel Cheney who has a BA in Textiles, with Commendation in Art History and an MA in Textiles. Nigel works in a multi textual way using similar processes to myself. He focuses on digital image manipulation and hand stitched embroidery. His work has a paint drawn effect using embroidery threads to add texture that resembles pen marking. Unlike Nigel my work has many more layers such as hand silk screen printing that offers my work that unique outcome.

Moreover unlike embroidery artists such as Ana Teresa Barboza or Kirsty Whitlock who tend to work 2 dimensionally I set out to create a 3 dimensional textiles installation. Like The Mae West Lips Sofa (1937) the surrealist sofa by Salvador Dalí. Just as Adli used his paranoiac-critical method, where he captures a realistic scene from the photograph of the

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## Research Outcome

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actress, The Bards rest uses a similar technique in its creation engaging the viewer to travel along the sofa exploring the many Shakespearian characters and artefacts of the period.

Further research and art work that I found inspiring to reference pattern and images was that of Turner prize winner Grayson Perry. Perry is known for his ceramic vases and tapestries who also uses complex surface employing many techniques, including “glazing, incision, embossing, and the use of photographic transfers Perry also calls upon the traditional techniques used in folk art and Greek pottery where he juxtaposes these with contemporary everyday issues. Perry’s tapestries are completed by computer controlled looms from photoshop generated files. I have taken inspiration from Grayson Perry’s mix of photographic and hand drawn image montages in referencing photographs of actors and actresses playing Shakespearian characters alongside hand drawn observations.

Another contemporary artist Lina Viktor who inspired me by her unique multi-disciplinary approach to the work she creates. Lina also brings ancient forms of practices such as gilding with 24-karat gold to life which add layers of light to her canvases, highlighting symbols and intricate patterns. Her work blurs lines of the real and the imagined as she calls upon narratives including her fascination of cosmologies, cultural and African heritage.

My work also conveys the shifting between real life documentary photographs, illustrations and my own observational drawings.

Due to time constraints and my need to create 3 dimensional aspects to the pieces I set about commissioning with my international connections and past collaborators who have contributed and helped realised my vision, namely fashion couturier designer Garen Demerdjian in Beirut and London based celebrated embroiderer Karen Nicol. I also worked extensively with silk weave company Stephen Walters of Sudbury, which has a 300-year history of creating unique woven textiles.

There have been challenges to overcome during this project.

The main issue to overcome was how to protect the outdoor piece (*The Love Settle*) from the typical British weather over a 7-month period with over 200,000 visitors sitting on it. I researched and tested many ways of waterproofing the fabric after hand printing and embellishing the pieces. I consulted the waxing company Nikwax who advised on various products. I spent many hours testing the effectiveness of the waterproofing chemicals with various results. The problems arose when applying the protective solutions, with many discolouring the printed materials. I was also concerned that the solutions and its chemicals would not react negatively with the printed areas on the cloth. After many hours of testing the Nikwax TX direct which is water based, non-flammable, contains no volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and is fluorocarbon free. I sponged on this solution by hand which had little effect to the material colour and composition.

The ups and downs and drama of how the pieces were created, with heroes and villains, near disaster and eventual success; what was possible and what was not able to be achieved; the uncertainty of timings and whether it would be produced on time; how I had to reduce a colour palette from 18 colours to 8 colours as that was the maximum allowed by the weavers; the first time that I saw the completed Love Settle just a matter of days earlier; the challenges of communicating with furniture teams who don’t speak English as their first language and explaining to them my vision; the clashes with the upholsterer which led to me taking the role of hero and learning the craft of upholstery myself; and the drama of the beading/lace maker in Beirut who produced the work and the challenge of how to get it back out of the country and into the UK, safely and in time.

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## Conclusion

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### *The Bard's Rest*

I was keen to site a modern piece of furniture with clean simple curves and lines that contrasted with the historical feeling of Halls Croft. The sofa is a direct response to the displays and archives at the Trust. The rich green textured painting is inspired by Shakespeare's contemporary, the artist Pierre Soulages, and offers a strong base for the imagery and textures of this piece. Green is often associated with luxury modern pieces of furniture and is a good base on this mid-twentieth century British made rare Greaves and Thomas sofa bed.

The intricate pattern I have woven is quite complicated. It is rich in symbolism. There are multiple layers to the piece and I want your eye to travel through its textures. My approach in presenting the residency was like a story, one I hope that feels very much influenced by the great story teller himself.

The hand printed designs on the sofa are taken from images of different sources: gold coins, the Tudor rose which appears quite heavily throughout the archive and furniture carvings in the houses. Even the stars come from an illustration in the archived book collection of a pair of pants worn by Hamlet.

The large flowers on the back rest of the sofa are taken from the collection's much represented and iconic Gentlemen's Nightcap and many of the archive's textiles pieces are represented, like the 1610 bodice decorated with an embroidered design of trailing stems with metal spangles/sequins, animals from the Sheldon tapestry, and broken hearts and toads from an unfinished embroidery piece.

The hand-machine embroidered pattern and hand-beaded base of the sofa is inspired by the lace cuffs in the painting of Mary Harvey, dated 1620, on display opposite the staircase at Halls Croft.

The main characters are embedded into the piece over the 4 base cushions. From left to right are Shakespeare's most well-known characters: Mercutio (from Romeo and Juliet), Ophelia (Hamlet), Ariel (The Tempest), and Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, and Macbeth themselves. All of the characters have been inspired by artifacts in the archive and are either illustrations or actors from stage.

The back-rest panel characters are from left to right: Queen Margaret (Henry VI), Ariel (The Tempest), and Bottom (Midsummer Night's Dream). The back panel of the sofa features Shakespeare's coat of arms, his initials and texture from a small bible cover written by John Speed, encased in a contemporary white silk cover with embroidery in silk and worsted crewel work with silver spangled and braid. There are also elements of the intricate embroidery of a 16th century sweet purse.

### *The Love Settle*

This unique work was inspired by the Trust's archive including the original rosette from David Garrick's Shakespeare Jubilee of 1769 and the theme of LOVE. Anne Hathaway's cottage is a 500 year-old property where Shakespeare courted his bride-to-be.

The Love Settle is based on the theme of Sailors' tattoos collected on their bodies as "souvenirs" of their visits. I have collected Shakespeare symbols and images from the archive along my journey of discovery. The composition is inspired by book illustrations that often appear in books, in particular *The Herball or Generall Historie of Plantes* by John Gerarde of 1597. The feeling of this piece is punk in style. Moreover, I was further inspired by the ceramic works of Grayson Perry whose work incorporates auto-biographical and contemporary references through story telling.

The star-like motives are taken from compasses from world maps found in the archives symbolising the world's appreciation for Shakespeare's works.

It has been a challenge to create an outdoor piece that is waterproof. I have digitally printed onto cotton drill then hand screen printed and wax finished followed by embroidery.

The main feature is the centre of the seat: Shakespeare's Coat of Arms surrounded by rays of light that are taken directly from a medicine pot at Hall's Croft. Above this is the Royal coat of arms of the United Kingdom which can often be seen above theatre stages across the country; above this sits Ariel the spirit who appears in Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*.

Throughout the piece you will see many love angels and spirits with images taken from wood carvings in Anne Hathaway's Cottage, including a symbol from the stained glass windows in Shakespeare's New Place. The quotes are inspired by references to love so often mentioned in Shakespeare's plays, not least 'thou art more lovely ...'.

I have added a modern form of communicating love within the panels in the form of Text Message abbreviations and internet acronyms, such as LOLV = LOTS OF LOVE, LY4E = LOVE YOU FOREVER, LUWAMH = LOVE YOU WITH ALL MY HEART.

Included also are symbols of modern-day love, tattoos and emojis.

I have successfully given the viewer an insight into the interests and preoccupations of my work and how I have translated a vast historical archive and reinterpreted it into contemporary artworks of a high quality and standard. I have openly discussed the processes, the experiments and explorations which were successful and those which were less so, or still unrealised or under-developed, such as the



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commissioning of weaving two or three sets of designs based on my new colour palettes, and the processes and production of the donkey, *Bottom*.



Fig. 5: The Garrick Donkey

The depth and scale of the work which I undertook and produced and the standard to which it has been executed in the final pieces is what makes the work very much more distinctive to me than work I have experienced before and is one of the reasons I feel the standard has been set very high in this residency, for future projects.

### Visitor numbers 10th March - 29th September

*The Love Settle*, Anne Hathaway's Cottage - 112,870 visitors

*The Bards Rest*, Halls Croft - 55,547 visitors

### Associated Items

- 3 items of painted ceramics inspired by the textiles have been deposited in the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's permanent (archive) collection.
- New woven cloth that has been archived in the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's collection, the "New interpretation of the Garrick Jubilee Fabric".
- Ceramic commercial pieces for sale at The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, plates, mugs and candle vases.
- Tea Towel for sale at The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust
- Gallery pieces – new porcelain vases sold at high profile ceramic gallery, The Stratford Art Gallery and Woburn Mosaic Gallery
- 6 Limited Edition Donkey Teddy Bears in collaboration with Canterbury Bears designed from the "New interpretation of the Garrick Jubilee Fabric" and inspired by Shakespeare's character "Bottom" from A Midsummer Night's Dream

The idea of creating a limited edition teddy bear comes from the fashion industry's love for this traditional artifact and use of fabric as a vehicle for an accessory and marketing to new audiences.

One of these donkeys will be going on show at The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust exhibition celebrating the 250 year old anniversary of the David Garrick Shakespeare Jubilee of 1769.

The two pieces *The Love Settle* and *The Bard's Rest* were exhibited from 8th March 2019 until 19th September 2019.

My ambition is to continue to research the colour DNA, texture and colour palette of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust archives and create a book to document the journey and outcome of a textured colour palette.

### Press

<http://www.saradarling.com/2019/04/22/when-fashion-meets-shakespeare/>

<http://www.soedited.com/soslashbullcreative/when-fashion-meets-shakespeare>

<https://warks.muddystilettos.co.uk/things-to-do/hotlist-jan-19/>

<https://allevents.in/stratford-upon-avon/the-art-of-design-with-lee-lapthorne/20002013469596>

<https://stratfordobserver.co.uk/news/artist-to-settle-in-at-shakespeares-birthplace-trust/>

<http://www.stratford-herald.com/94528-new-artist-residence-makes-mark.html>

### Impact of the work

The motifs and imagery I chose to use in the pieces I created link back to the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust archives. I worked with them to create contemporary imagery and the text gave them a new perspective on the archive and what is contained within it, as well as how objects steeped in history can be given a present-day twist for today's audiences. My processes led to a personal reflection on the work and its success, failure, challenge, adaptation and resilience.

The processes I went through in examining the archive and the items I became fascinated with are reflected in the works. The textiles multi layered processes appeal to new audiences, those new to a contemporary and innovative approach to textiles but also whose already aware of Shakespeare.

Risks have been taken in the concept and delivery of the work and they have been successfully accomplished. I have also pushed boundaries in interdisciplinary working with teams outside the UK to produce the final pieces and in the presentation of motifs and emblems in the *Love Settle* which are presented in a way which is contemporary, uses current language style of text message and abbreviation and looks somewhat 'punk' in its style – I think this is a risk in presenting this style of work in a traditional, historical setting to audiences who may not embrace its qualities. On the other hand, I think it will be more accessible to new and younger audiences and help the trust to connect with these audiences more.

The artforms of digital and traditional textiles, fashion, upholstery, interior design, printing, product / furniture

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design, fine art, graphics, embroidery all merge together in this project. In terms of interdisciplinary working I think the work breaks new ground, especially when considered in its historical / contemporary context; it honors the historical whilst embracing the contemporary. In terms of scale and ambition, I feel this is demonstrated through my commitment to learn upholstery in order to achieve the piece having been let down by a professional upholsterer in the creation of The Bard's Rest.

The works will continue to shine a light on the past and present ideas to a current day audience.

Delia Garratt, director of cultural engagement at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, said, "Lee has been a great support in the progressive development of our creative programming, sharing Shakespeare's stories and his creative genius with new audiences who may not otherwise connect with the playwright. The pieces are truly beautiful works of art, presenting Shakespeare as relevant, contemporary and accessible to people of all ages."



**Ravensbourne**  
**University London**  
6 Penrose Way  
Greenwich Peninsula  
London  
SE10 0EW  
United Kingdom

[ravensbourne.ac.uk](http://ravensbourne.ac.uk)  
[info@rave.ac.uk](mailto:info@rave.ac.uk)  
+44 20 3040 3500

@RavensbourneUK  
  

