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Textiles as potent messengers in interpretation settings - paper

This paper examines the potential for textile objects to be used as interpretive tools to communicate about natural and cultural heritage. Designers working in visitor centres, museums and interpretive settings strive to communicate meaningfully and memorably with their audiences. Such projects require an interdisciplinary approach to underpin design ideas practice and media. Designers now utilise a diverse range of communication media that extend far beyond the familiar print based formats of brochures, books and signs to include, digital, sound, time and object based media. This expansion of media has seen recent interpretation projects commission art, craft and design objects to communicate ideas about history, ecology, storytelling and place. The paper discusses how designers have employed textile objects and media as the vehicle for communication in visitor centres and interpretive displays. Selected Australian case studies illustrate how textile objects can be potent messengers communicating about place, ideas and history in visitor centres, museums and other heritage settings. Examples from The Melbourne Museum, Lake St Clair visitor’s centre and the Deloraine visitors centre will be discussed. The author’s research in communication design and the interpretation of natural and cultural heritage, provides the theoretical framework for the paper.

Margaret Woodward is a lecturer in Communication Design at the National Institute of Design at Swinburne University of Technology, in Melbourne. She is also completing a research masters degree in design at Curtin University of Technology. Margaret has exhibited textile based work in Australia and New Zealand and this paper combines her interests in textiles with her research into communication design in visitor centres and museums.