

New post on the Fabric Thread



Fabric of Life – and love

by [wiebina](#)



When I walked into Mary Jose's shop in Melbourne Street for the first time, I thought - *so this is what heaven must look like*. Fabrics and textiles from all over the world were hanging on the walls, draped over tables, and tucked into shelves. The colour was glorious, but the smell was even better. I reminded myself of what I always tell my children before we go into a shop: 'This is a hands-behind-your-back-shop. Don't touch.' But alas – I couldn't help myself – I had to touch everything. I stroked the suzani's, I hugged the kanthas, I caressed the Indian embroideries. I loved Mary's shop and couldn't wait to meet her.

Since then I learned that Mary is not just a Fair Trade textile dealer, but also one of the leading textile conservationists in the country, with an impressive list of conservation projects from across the world to her name.



As an Art History student in Canberra, Mary soon realized textiles were her first love, so after graduating, she moved to the UK where she studied at the Textile Conservation Centre, then housed at the Hampton Court Palace. She spent several years at the [Textile Conservation Studio](#) where she also worked on the Hampton Court Tapestries. After returning to Adelaide

she joined [ArtLab Australia](#), working on conservation projects for different Australian and international museums and galleries. For the past five years Mary has been an independent conservation consultant with clients across the globe. (The conservation of the [banners in the St Peter's cathedral](#) is one of her ongoing projects.)



It was a textile tour to China in 1990 that sparked Mary's interest in ethnic embroideries and textiles, and paved the way for her business venture as a textile trader. She travels regularly to India and other Asian countries where she meets the artisans. Mary is a strong believer in ethical trading and she buys all her textiles from the original artists in their traditional environment, thereby ensuring authenticity and quality. By following Fair Trade principals she also ensures that her business supports community development, self-sufficiency and sustainability.

Mary has recently moved her shop online and her conservation studio to her home in North Adelaide. On the day I visited she was working on a vintage scarf which needed to be cleaned and mounted for a private client; a military jacket dating from World War I which needed some restoration, for a private collector; and a raised embroidery piece which needed professional cleaning, also for a private collector.



The walls in her studio are lined with shelves – some filled with her glorious textile collection, some filled with her vast collection of textile and art books, and some filled with her growing range of handmade cards.

These cards are part of a new initiative she recently launched. Beautifully embroidered or printed textiles, designed and handmade by individual artists, are framed with cardstock and made into greeting cards. But it is more than a card; it is an artwork all in itself. Mary stocks several ranges from India and a vibrant range from Malawi. Every card she sells help support an artist and his/her family in an ethical and

sustainable fashion.

Mary's house-studio-shop is indeed a little piece of heaven. Not just because of the sight and smell of glorious fabrics, but because of her love and devotion to the origin of these textiles - the history of the old textiles which she respectfully helps preserve, and the future of the ethnic textile traditions which she so lovingly supports. Her love for textiles

reaches into the hearts of all she works with – artists, collectors and customers. Mary's life is not a hands-behind-your-back life. It is a hug, embrace and touch life.

[wiebina](#) | July 28, 2014 at 6:44 PM | Tags: [embroidery](#), [Fabric](#), [Interviews](#), [Museums](#), [St Peter's Cathedral](#), [Textile](#), [textile conservation](#), [travel](#) | Categories: [artisans](#), [Fabric/textile/cloth](#) | URL: <http://wp.me/p3t2x5-46>

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