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'Muriel Rose'

Crafts Study Centre, University College
for the Creative Arts, Farnham

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Report by **Carolyn Ferguson**

THIS EXHIBITION is the first to look at the life and career of Muriel Rose (1897–1986). Muriel Rose is not a household name, yet she left a lasting legacy to the modern crafts movement. As quilters, some of us are aware of Rose's association with the Rural Industries Bureau (RIB) scheme operating from 1929 to the outbreak of war, and the importance of her gallery – the Little Gallery in Ellis Street, Chelsea – where she provided an outlet for the quilters working within the scheme. We are also aware that she was formidable in her search for and promotion of quality items, and her ability to sell for top prices. It is not often realised that she also recorded the social deprivations of the women whom she met and how much they wanted or needed work. After the gallery closed in 1939, Rose became involved with the British Council and curated a number of important craft exhibits to show to the world the excellence of British crafts. She was also involved in the Dartington Hall Conference of 1952, and in 1970 became a founding Trustee of the Crafts Study Centre, England's first purpose-built museum for modern craft. This current exhibition draws together items from the archives and collections from all these bodies, giving some idea of Rose's important legacy.

The exhibition space is relatively small but all 41 exhibits are well displayed and the archive material gives added interest. In overall appearance it is rather like going into Heals in the 1960s. I

particularly like the variety of items, ranging from wallpapers and jewellery to ceramics, cutlery and furniture. The wonderful sycamore dining table and chairs made by Edward Barnsley in the 1930s add to the setting. No craft exhibition would be complete without pots from Bernard Leach, Hans Coper and Lucie Rie, but I was very taken with the stoneware pots for bulbs by Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie – beautiful for miniature daffodils. Quilters will be interested in the textiles, both woven and printed. My eye was taken by the juxtaposition of 1830s chintz with a 19th-century Kashmir shawl and a 1940s scarf by Barron and Larcher. One RIB quilt, clearly of Welsh origin, is displayed together with a bedjacket made by Irene Morgan c.1948. Rose's notebook and photographs of quilts from the Little Gallery are also shown. Sadly, the lighting in this cabinet is poor and the notebook difficult to read. Visitors can also marvel at the stitching in a child's smock and perhaps rue the demise of this particular craft.

In all, a very enjoyable and interesting exhibition, well worth going to see. I can also recommend the book associated with the exhibition, *Muriel Rose: A Modern Crafts Legacy*, which is edited by the exhibition's curator Jean Vacher.

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Read more about the Rural Industries Bureau scheme and Irene Morgan in *The Quilter* issue 109, Winter 2006.



From top to bottom:
View of the gallery
Rural Industries Bureau quilt
Irene Morgan bedjacket

The 'Muriel Rose' exhibition is open from Tuesdays to Saturdays 10–5 (4pm on Saturdays), but call to check opening times over bank holiday periods. For more information call 01252 891450 or visit www.csc.ucreative.ac.uk.