A room of one’s own
Paula Reason unpicks the thinking behind a new body of work crafted for Collect Open, which opens in February

TWELVE AMBITIOUS CRAFT installations are the highlight of the Craft Council’s Collect Open this year; among them new work by Paula Reason. Reason’s practice is focused on the relationship we have with the spaces we occupy, a subject she explores in an installation of embroidered silk panels, which examines the creative spaces of established craftspeople.

‘The starting point for this work was when my father became very ill. I wanted to hold on to him and comfort him in any way that I could. While he was unwell, his room said more about his personality than he could convey himself. It was my haven; one that he palpably yearned for while he was in hospital.

‘With many years as a practising architect, I fell back on the technical drawing conventions I was so familiar with to carefully record every aspect of my father’s room. In doing so it brought me even closer to him. The result was a body of work called ‘A Love Letter to my Father’. The centrepiece is a three-dimensional 15 scaled version of his room, machine embroidered onto a quilted silk base and constructed in panels, like a box.

‘After years of designing spaces for people to live in, this project made me aware of how important the objects and paraphernalia we fill these spaces with are. It provided an insight into the way that textiles could be used to investigate this further.

‘Collect Open created an opportunity to define how this could be done. The anthropologist Daniel Miller wrote in his book Stuff that things make people just as much as people make things. So, I wondered about people who have spent their lives crafting some of the objects that we surround ourselves with? Do they have a closer connection to things and therefore to their surroundings – and how does this influence both them and their work?

‘I selected people who have lived a life in craft with very different stories. The artist, collector and author Diana Springall was one such person. I visited her home and studio, a 17th Century Oast Cottage bought in 1975, and lovingly restored to create a place of inspiration and a home for her two sons. Through talking to her and recording the space, her delight in materials and passion for textiles was evident. I wanted my response to reflect something of the layers of history within the room, as well as Diana’s warmth and generosity, which the space supports. I selected a variety of coloured threads from Diana’s work, and laid them out in a series of striated bands to give a sense of the passing of time embodied in the room.

‘Michael Brennand-Wood was another candidate. In 2015 he lost his studio, and it was a traumatic time for him in many ways. Since then he has been trying to create a new studio. Michael sent me photographs of both the old and the proposed new studio. My aim was to explore what made the old room so special and to see if I could help Michael to realise his new workspace, by investigating the essence of the original and representing the new
through the medium of textiles. The fabric of the old studio captured all those moments of ambition, delight and struggle through the marks and paint spatters on the floor and walls. It also held the materials, samples and artwork he had built up, layer by layer, over that time.

'I drew both the old and the new studios to scale, and objects from the old studio were literally transferred into the empty new shell. I carefully lifted the accidental patterns left on the floor of the old studio and recreating them in an overlay of printed silk gauze, over which I created the machine-embroidered drawing. 'Making this work has taken me on an adventure, which drew on my architectural experience to explore the relationship that we have with our surroundings. It’s been both an absorbing and illuminating experience and I hope the installation at Collect will encourage others to reflect on their own homes and work spaces to better understand how the way we shape them can influence both our lives and creativity.'

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COLLECT the International Art Fair for Modern Craft and Design organised by the Crafts Council takes place at Somerset House, London 27 February-1 March.