

Hand & Lock supports Opus Anglicanum at the V&A

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Scott Gordon Heron, the house's head of design, talks techniques and tradition following the opening of the new exhibition

There is a lot of embroidery in fashion at the moment and we work with many luxury fashion brands. This season, we collaborated with Burberry and, as with all our clients, we work very closely with them. There's usually a great deal of design development after they come to us with an original concept; this season, they asked us to produce 55,700ft of silver Russia braid, which was used to embellish three jackets in their show.



We are known for our goldwork, which is hugely predominant in ceremonial pieces and the military. The gold wire comes as bullion, which is a very thin wire, or as "passing", which has a core of cotton with a gold wire wrapped around and we then pass that through the fabric. Our range of clients is very broad, from the ecclesiastical or military to theatre and film, plus a great deal of private clients who want things personalised or to have special pieces made for them. In fact, there's been a huge trend recently for personalisation and monogramming.

The V&A in London contacted us about getting involved with the Opus Anglicanum: Masterpieces of English Medieval Embroidery exhibition. It's an incredible show that illustrates how England was a central figure in embroidery at that time. During the later middle ages, England enjoyed an international reputation for the quality of its luxury embroideries and is where the show gets its name - Opus Anglicanum means 'English Work'. The pieces are extraordinary – there is one that hasn't left Spain since the 14th century, and some took 25 years to make. The techniques are so minute that when you look at the pieces, they actually look like a painting, until you look closer and see the work.



Obviously, embroiderers only worked by daylight then. People probably approached it as a meditation, a discipline, and many of these pieces are ecclesiastical, so they're made by people who have a strong connection with religion. Many of the techniques in the exhibition are techniques that we're still using today – that period informed a great deal of modern practice.

There are a lot of embroideries we do today that, in another 50 or 100 years, will be regarded in the same way as pieces in Opus Anglicanum are now. We're producing very small parts of design history or social history and I think that's really important and exciting. When I was a student, there were four universities in the UK doing hand embroidery; now there are about six or eight.

I think we all see it as our responsibility to support and engage people coming up. We're part of a very big picture. We've been around for 250 years and it's a responsibility to keep these traditions alive.



SCOTT GORDON HERON is head of design at Hand & Lock. The historic Mayfair embroiderer celebrates its 250th anniversary next year and now counts luxury brands including Louis Vuitton, Alexander McQueen and Chanel among its varied clients; handembroidery.com

Opus Anglicanum: Masterpieces of English Medieval Embroidery runs from 1 October to 5 February 2017 at the V&A, London; vam.ac.uk