

Introducing Knitting Machines _ Ashgabad Turkmenistan
Funding and Support – British Embassy Turkmenistan
20 February 06 – 27 February 06

Personnel: Joan Murray Knitware Designer/Maker
Freyalyn Close Hainsworth Hand Spinner/knitter

Hosts for workshops :House of Fashion – Gulalek Gurbanalyyewna
Project Cheper – Gulshat Amandurdieyeva

On Monday there was an introductory visit to the House of Fashion to discuss and confirm the programme.

The events started promptly on Tuesday morning with a fashion show presented by the House of Models showing work from the collections of Joan Murray, Freyalyn Close Hainsworth and the House of Fashion. There was a short power point presentation of knitting in the UK from the Crafts Council of Great Britain. Formal welcome and thanks expressed by the deputy ambassador Chris Bowden and Joan Murray. Also in the audience the Turkmenistan foreign minister, the British embassy projects officer Shemshat Mukhammetkulieva, Tillyayev Azim website co ordinator of the Cultural Directory and his photographer, who recorded the events, along with staff of the House of Fashion, staff from the Turkmenistan Carpet Museum and ladies of the Project Cheper.

Discussions developed between the various groups and Joan described her teaching programme along with an example of a UK students work book and garment also presented in the fashion show. The House of Fashion described their aims in raising awareness of design detail and silhouette to the country and how their staff developed ideas and skills. They liked the journals and books brought by Joan and a couple of these were donated to the House of Fashion in gratitude for all the fine hospitality and encouragement. Until Wednesday afternoon a number of practical workshops took place, one sharing ideas from basic machine knitting skills by Joan and one by Freyalyn who shared and exchanged her spinning skills with other ladies and discussed the hand knitting patterns and techniques she has developed, and there was a weaving workshop with a little loom enlightening us on the pile weave and kilm weave techniques used in Turkmenistan for thousands of years. These were enthusiastically received and most of the audience participated in each. All of these workshops were enlivened by the lunch and tea times when more sharing and ideas were exchanged (in some cases about recipes and traditional foods as well as textiles and fashion!)

The house of Fashion explained they had been given about 10/12 electronic Passap machines and there was no one who could teach them how to use them. Joan has suggested she will try and bring this expertise on her next visit as she has

used these machines in the past but needs a refresher course. Joans machines are Brother and Knitmaster and have different buttons etc.

Thursday morning was a wonderful diversion to see the outdoor market and get a flavour of the making that goes on in the villages and is brought in to the city for sale. The smells, sounds and colours have left such a good memory with us and Joan was able to purchase a few items of current embroidery to show her students in the UK. Freyalyn bought some small useful equipment for spinning. Gulshat was our guide and we were grateful to her hospitality during preparations for working with the project Cheper.

We checked over the knitting machines we had sent over during the past year and were able to add parts brought over on this visit to make them work better. The object of these workshops was to teach basic knitting, including short row knitting and then garment development from this. Joan's current work uses these techniques. The students worked very hard during the next two days taking a very good interest and most of the machine knitting objectives were achieved.

Freyalyn and Joan had hoped to introduce the use of indigenous yarns as well as the basic machine training, however although this was suggested it was seen to be an ongoing research. The fibres required for the spinning for the knitting machine need further combing before spinning, but this may be possible when the ladies of the project feel they have learnt to master the knitting machines with the more straight forward industrially spun yarns first. The garments that were created showed great possibilities and with practise the students will be able to use these machines successfully. Joan hopes to introduce pattern knitting on the next visit along with sharing more garment silhouettes and ideas. Project Cheper showed an eagerness to develop their skills for the international market and I hope my next visit helps them continue to achieve this as successfully and this first step.

There was time for a visit to the amazing carpet museum with a lovely gift of the new book just published to bring home with us, along with a visit to shops selling excellent cotton goods. Throughout our visit we had the added support of Shirin an interpreter who I felt was as eager to learn as all our friends in the workshops. Other things that we were able to fit because of the good organisation was a shared show of our work in a gallery owned by Natalya who also put on a concert with the famous Hakberdy playing and a short early morning visit to the old Hippodrome to see the most amazing horses I have ever seen, Akel Tekke. Thank you to The Cultural Directory for introducing us to Turkmenistan, it is beautiful!