Claire Barber is an artist and Senior Lecturer in Textile Crafts. Claire graduated from the Royal College of Art in 1994 in Fine Art: Textility. Her work explores the relationship between place and the everyday. She records her surrounding environment, predominantly producing site specific work. Since 2005, Claire has worked extensively with communities affected by environmental and economic change. An Art Plus Development Award (2005) and Art Plus Final Award (2006) enabled her collaboration with RA Webb and production of You Are the Journey within the context of the Hythe to Southampton Ferry commute. While in 2009 she was awarded “Place Space and Identity” which prompted the development of an interactive artwork on the North Staithes shore. Currently she is completing The Weymouth Relief Road Project, in collaboration with land artists Richard Harris in preparation for 2012 Olympics.

Claire has received numerous commissions and residencies both nationally and internationally. Commissions include Land and Samuel, Revealing the Water by the Samling Foundation (2002), Stopping Lightly on All Maws commissioned for Westonton Arboretum and Kingsclere Palace, South of England. In 2004, she received a commission to complete her project titled “Revealing the Water” in Weymouth, which included work at Silverstone and at the London Olympics. Over the last ten years, Claire has undertaken a number of projects in the UK and internationally, including commissions and residencies in Japan, China, and the USA.

Claire’s approach to making is to question the nature of “where is the work” while she is engaged in time between process and completion. She is intimately responsive to the notion of site and its occupants. Claire has created work in response to numerous commission briefs and residencies which has informed her practice through dialogue with members of the public, project directors, curators, and various funding bodies such as the Arts Council. This multiplicity of contexts has meant that collaboration and the exchange of ideas have become intrinsic to her practice.

In 2002 the Samling Foundation presented a project titled “Land and the Sampling”. Claire was one of five artists chosen to participate in the project and to develop a temporary artwork during a month long residency at Kielder Forest, Northumberland. David Butler, the author of “Land and the Sampling” writes of Claire’s text: “The multiplicity of contexts has meant that collaboration and the exchange of ideas have become intrinsic to her practice.”

The architectural railway line emerges from the northern shore of Kielder Water and continues north across the border of Scotland. Claire began her work by cycling, teasing behind the large wooden roller woven with wool. As the roller dragged rolling on both sides, the wool melted into felt. This is the oldest way to make textiles – weaving on a loom with fibers until they met together. It seems so stupidly simple it could never work out but the felted wool is both strong and supple and wonderfully soft.”

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During this three month exchange in Japan, working alongside textile practitioner Teruyuki Yoshida, Claire lived and worked in Hamarikyō in the suburb of Kyōto. Claire’s combined interest in art and fashion, and her understanding of the aesthetic and symbolic value of reclaimed objects began to subvert the traditional notions of craft. The subsequent exhibition in 2004 “Through the Surface” was a collaborative exhibition of textile artists from Britain and Japan. The director, Lesley Miller writes of Claire’s exploration of the relationship between the textual and textile as a complex project, operating on several fronts and around Kyōto. While in Japan, Claire began to rethink her relationship between self-performance and materiality. She was particularly influenced by the Japanese attention to detail and craft, and the need to reflect within their customs, whether this was a tea party or a puppet show. Presented against a mountain backdrop, the notion of summoning a collective ritual started to evolve in her work. In 2005 an Arts Plus Development Award was instrumental in bringing her to the forefront of RA Webb together for the first time to work with Barber and Webb. The award provided an opportunity to increase their skills and to establish Barber and Webb as a successful collaboration. On receiving a Final Arts Plus Award in 2006, Barber, Webb re-designed the Hythe Ferry Ten Journey Ticket as a special reflection, combining the functionality of the ticket with an interactive public artwork: where the tickets are clipped creating an opportunity to place commuters’ thoughts and comments. The results have been complex social patterns and ephemeral poetry onto their ticket, which were gradually erased throughout the day by the daily public interaction.

The approach was continued in 2008 during “Place Space and Identity” a commission which enabled Claire to work with much wider and broader audience. Inspired by a large company’s advertising campaign using thermo chrome inks, Claire used the same technology to create a bus ticket upon which the warmth of human touch from passengers’ hands renders new layers of text. From the ticket surface, it also presented a new way to explore a reactive and intuitive approach to tracing human touch in time. Two batches of 367,000 tickets were released on the First Group fleet of buses leaving the Hanley and Alderley Green depot in Stockton-on-Trent. A bus ticket may seem a modest, and rather throwaway space for a public artwork. However it is the ticket’s facility to reach so many individuals on a very immediate and embedded level that fascinates Claire. As a ticket is bought, handled, stuffed into a purse or back pocket it presents a discreet level of human intimacy contrary to the mechanical functionality of the ticket as artefact.

Claire is an artist, whose working methods touch people’s everyday lives, asking them to record their own thoughts and experiences and then using the accumulated material to make a visual intervention about their understanding of place. A series of the Weymouth Relief Roads currently being built through the community of Littlemoor, Dorset in preparation for the 2012 Olympics. Claire has collected the thoughts and feelings of those living in the area to challenge the preconceptions of a community linked and simultaneously divided through the construction of a new road. After a period of consultation with Littlemoor community members, road builders engineers and Dorset County Councilors, Claire subsequently developed an interactive artwork entitled “Littlemoor Wishes”. The work consisted of print instructions, tie claps and three laser cut, neoprene tags contained in a small transparent clip-seal bag that were individually posted to 2,500 Littlemoor households in 2009. A pen was also provided for people to hand write their own wishes, desires, protests or hopes, with instructions to stick them onto the metal fence surrounding the Relief Road works. The response was that within a short space of time huge clusters of brightly coloured tags were seen blowing on the fence, fighting against a moving backstop of road building.