

Selwedge

DESIGNER EDGE



JOY PITTS

Showy types like to flaunt their designer labels all over town, but for most of us lesser mortals, clothing tags stay hidden from view. Now, one very fine artist is getting in on the act and making masterpieces from these rag-trade IDs.

UK-based artist Joy Pitts uses labels by the thousand. She collects them, unpicks them from garments and pins them onto canvas. She often gets asked if she has any labels left on her own clothes or if she buys garments just for these tiny tabs. She answers, “I only remove labels from garments that are being thrown away to be recycled and I actually don’t have a huge wardrobe of clothes.”

Label gathering takes up a huge chunk of her art-making time. “The collection of used labels is ongoing, and I usually make visits to charity shops once a week. I unpick labels from rag discards, so I don’t actually buy the garments. I also approach specific brands, if I want to use their labels. For example, for a portrait I did of Winston Churchill, I chose Henry



Poole & Co, Turnbull & Asser and Lock & Co Hatters [clothing and accessories manufacturers], because they all created bespoke items for Churchill. All three outfitters were extremely happy to supply their bespoke labels for this project,” she says. “It’s the context of the label that I’m looking for and the message it will put across once assembled



in the image. I try to make work that is relevant to what is going on in the world and I always use subjects that interest me.”

A sketch based on a photograph is Joy’s starting point for each design. She then covers the background in labels and overlays the image on top, attaching the labels to the canvas with dressmaker pins. “Planning out the canvas is the most challenging part – constantly measuring to the millimetre to make sure that the chosen background labels will fit exactly in horizontal and vertical rows. It is more like a technical drawing challenge,” she says.



Joy estimates that she’s used 75,000 labels in her artworks so far and has devised a low-cost system for organising the ones waiting to be used.

“The new labels that have been donated to me are all stored in clear boxes with an index, so they are easy to locate. Old labels that I have gathered from used clothing are in old cardboard shoe boxes in various colourways. I have a pile of labels still attached to part of the garment just waiting to be unpicked. I also have a shoe box of vintage labels, some from brands that no longer exist. I hope to make a piece of work with these in the future.”

Find out more about Joy Pitts by visiting; www.joypitts.co.uk. Or you can email her directly; joy@joypitts.co.uk. Original artworks and limited-edition prints are available for sale.

— Janai Velez

