

Out of the Blue: Embroiderers' Notes

agitated — *Isabella Thorpe*

Tambour work is really hard to explain – it involves a simple chain stitch which is pulled through and twisted by a tambour hook. I wanted it to look like handwriting, and tambour work makes it look like a real chain. The text ended with 'I want my mum', which absolutely broke my heart; I left the long threads hanging down because my word for the back was *agitated*.

ambushed — *Lauren Cheetham*

The word *ambushed* is interesting. I thought about how you could be going about your daily life and then get trapped. It just happens; there's no avoiding it. I embroidered 'ambushed' very large; it's such a loud word and I wanted people to be able to read it and know what it says. Also, my garment is really large so I didn't want to sew a small little word which would diminish it or make it seem smaller than it is. I did it really big; it took me quite a while.

I used seeding – it started off as trellis work and it sort of flowed into whatever. This one is satin stitch, then French knots and couching. For a French knot you take your thread and wrap it round the needle, and you go back down into the fabric and it makes a funny little knot which kind of looks like a flower. They look like little tiny rosebuds. It is really hard to get the hang of, but once you can do them it is really quick.

battle — *Wendy Shirvani*

I wanted my embroidery to reflect the complexity of electrical activity in the brain and show epilepsy as its chaotic outcome. I identified six distinct statements in the testimony each of which felt powerful in its own right. I wanted the letters to be consistent and organised but the placing of the statements on the garment to be less so, to describe the tension between order and disorder. I printed the text from the computer directly on to white fabric. This enabled me to embroider the statements before attaching them to the garment.

I used free machine embroidery. It seemed right to use electricity to transcribe a testimony about epilepsy on to fabric using 'electric' coloured threads. As I

stitched I became increasingly aware of the power, noise and intensity of the activity: I had the feeling this was being embedded in the fibres of the garment. I saved all the waste threads that had been snipped off during the process of embroidery and construction and scattered them beneath a fine net in my representation of a brain on the back of the garment. Again the random lengths and colours of thread suggested electrical activity in the brain to me. I also captured the text within two layers of net (black over white), the design of which suggested synapses to me, to create the vision of text emerging from within. I continued the electrical feel of the piece by framing it in fluorescent yellow ribbon and adding ties of fluorescent fabric to represent the strategy of holding things together while battling with such a powerful force.

blank — *Anne Menary*

I use a lot of text in my textile work and stitch mainly by hand. I used a whipped back stitch in an embroidery hoop to keep the area I worked on taut. I kept the design simple and absorbed the words as I worked on the piece, using the threads and colours to illustrate the feelings.

brain — *Olivia Kent*

I chose to do smocking. I thought it was evocative of the brain, its different pathways, nuances and pockets, but without being unsubtle. I did the letters with an organdie fabric which is a little more stiff so that peaks stand up and have a good texture.

The significance of the ultraviolet thread came in when the testimony talks about the brain versus the self, and how they are both the same thing and at the same time separate. This person says that the self almost recedes and then re-emerges when he experiences an epileptic fit. He asks where the self lies in the brain and how it is intertwined with the rest of the functions of the body. So *i* is the only letter in *brain* that has ultraviolet thread, to draw attention to that self part of it, its more individual aspect.

On the front I decided to highlight the words *brain* and *self* at the top. The nightgown originally had pin pricking which ended near the top, so I continued two columns down to show the left brain/right brain dichotomy. All of the black is handstitched; on the left it is in Van Dyke with the little spikes that remind me of the

brain stem, and on the right it is a whipped back stitch which looks a little more like handwriting, a little more fluid. Certain words in the paragraph stood out to me and I chose to machine stitch them in the fluorescent thread: I hope they will really stand out under the ultraviolet light. Everything to do with the brain is on the left, and everything that has to do with the self is on the right. I wanted to really highlight what this person experienced when they had an epileptic seizure. It looks very sculptural.

brave — *Lucy Martin*

I chose to do a lion where every bit of embroidery would show up under both ultraviolet and normal light and be visible at every point in the exhibition. I didn't want any part to be hidden, so it's done quite large and the patterns are very linear. I used running stitch and back stitch and some French knots on the lines as well, but I tried to keep it simple. The words are meant to be legible from a distance as well as close up, so I doubled over to make six strands of the machine cotton: it's very bold and the lines are thick.

clusters — *Alexandra Jordan*

It was a fantastically visceral description of what an epileptic fit actually feels and even tastes like. With the stitching, I used the fluorescent thread to highlight particularly striking words and changed the colour every word to reflect the varied nature of a seizure.

darkness — *Catherine Gould*

These are my partner's words about his epilepsy. My first thoughts on reading them were of a train inside a tunnel, the smoke clouding and confusing everything, and the feeling of release in the moments after it leaves the tunnel.

I created the design on paper, using a lightbox to play around with sizing and layout. I wanted the imagery to remain quite simple so that Mark's words were the focus of the piece. I used a basic back stitch to achieve a solid line, and French knots for the rivet detailing.

déjà vu — *Jenni Geddes*

I picked out words that express the feelings and sensations of an aura – *seizure*, *take over* and *dizziness* – and used satin stitch and chain stitch in varying sizes and thickness of thread to emphasise their importance.

On the back I tried to reflect the peaks and troughs of the letters in *déjà vu*, to illustrate the action of falling and rising and continuing on a path that will be repeated like being chained in a web. I left the ends loose to represent the disrupted nerve endings.

devastating — *Helena Baker*

This was one of the most challenging embroidery projects I have ever done. For me, it was all about time, emotional power and the mental and physical endurance of stitching the thread in and out, day in, day out. It affected my understanding of what it must be to live with epilepsy. And working with the old Victorian garment added a further context both to the material itself and to the testimony and my interpretation. I found myself imagining the garment as it had been worn or might be worn again; imagining the warmth of a body beneath its seams; and through the layering of every letter, I began to memorise the testimony by heart as though the words were coming from my own mind. There seemed to develop an almost spiritual connection with the writer through my own creative embodiment of each individual word.

I wanted to illustrate the emotional and psychological impacts of epilepsy: upset, crying, loss of future and fear of sudden death. My intention was for the embroidery to take on the presence of scars, stitching up the open wounds epilepsy cuts deep into life. As a sculpture artist, I specifically produced the embroidery to have three dimensional, tactile properties, perhaps so that these wounds could be actively stitched and worked with cathartically in the present. Their thicknesses and sizes parallel varying emotional intensities and the words are like wounds, stitched gently, smoothly, roughly, or prickly and infused with electricity, fraying on both the inside and outside. However, these wounds with their multiple knots are unlikely ever to be reopened, generating a sense of security.

I used the ultraviolet sensitive thread across the entire testimony, not only so that each word can be read in all strengths of light, but also to highlight the significance of every word and every moment of life. By accentuating words such as 'positivity', 'you', and 'hope' I wanted indirectly to convey encouraging messages of inner strength

amidst the uncertainty. And by joining words – 'not-controllable' and 'no-sleep' – to emphasise what's lacking and then separating them through colour, I wanted metaphorically to give rise to the possibility of new treatments and controllable symptoms.

difficulties — *Margaret Woods Moore*

I did my embroidery on the machine partly because I needed to work quickly but also to give a better impression of the erratic nature of a seizure – even though I have no idea how that really feels. I used basic letter forms because Louise has learning difficulties; this was a way visually to acknowledge that. I also wanted to make it slightly difficult to read, to introduce discomfort and challenge so that the viewer had to concentrate on the text and really think about the words. I chose to use only the blue and yellow luminous threads, highlighting in yellow what I felt were the key words, the ones that for me punched the most meaning.

I wish, however, that on the back I had put the word *difficulties* running vertically like a spine as Louise deals with real life-changing difficulties every day. She has to have such strength to do this.

disorientated — *Cassandra Poad*

I put all the letters a different size and different ways – upside down, flipped over, distorted – because when you're disorientated you often can't see straight. You might see things as far away or really close. Some of the letters are faint. Some will show up amazingly in the ultraviolet, and others will only show up a bit because I have mixed black threads so they're not really clear. I didn't want the stitches to be the same either, so I used lots of different ones: satin, stem, heavy chain, back stitch, cross stitch and herringbone.

The front is all in black stitch apart from the words that describe how he feels after a seizure: disorientated, afraid, embarrassed, exhausted. They will really show up in the ultraviolet.

dizziness — *Jennifer Pound*

I related very closely to the person who wrote these words: they reminded me of a close friend who has epilepsy, and indeed of my own struggles with chronic ill health. I also sensed a bodily presence in

the garment itself, a Victorian chemise which had clearly been darned a few times in its long life and was very fine and delicate.

It was important for the testimony to be clearly legible from a distance and I used a light backstitch in black for the main body of text. I picked out words that described symptoms of epilepsy such as 'fall unconscious' and 'loss of memory', and wove the neon yellow thread through the black stitches so they would all be illuminated at the same time. On the back I enlarged the letters and sewed them in the neon blue, cascading vertically down. I also bordered each letter with a tangled mess of yellow stitches to represent the disordered brain signals that arise during a seizure.

drained — *Sabina Lima*

The whole testimony gives that powerful feeling of things running out, so I put the word inside the circle of a plughole – like it is being drained. I made some cords from the threads we were given and tried out different compositions and thickness. For the design I decided to work with the yellow ultraviolet thread, and for the word the blue ultraviolet thread. And also the needle makes a hole, which is the same as the void left by the feeling being drained.

empowering — *Sandra Morris*

I like the idea of empowerment through understanding and support and that's why I combined a strong visual image of the word with a band of lightly sewn uplifted hands around the bottom of the garment. I used a running stitch because it is a powerful storyteller. I was reminded of *kantha* work from southeast Asia.

empty — *Michelle Duxbury*

The words were incredibly powerful and moving; in fact, I cried the first time I read them. It was really important that they took centre stage. On the front of the nightgown I focused the design on them and kept the font simple and clear. I used back stitch, mainly because it's one of my favourite stitches for working lettering, and I knew it would produce the clear, bold text I wanted. I incorporated an image of the brain as the element that would appear under ultraviolet light, to give a sense of the change of electrical functioning during a seizure. For the word *empty* on the back I chose a font that looked like it was still being

drafted because what really stayed with me was a sense of the writer having to rebuild herself after a seizure.

exposé — *Hannah Savage*

My mother, Beth, suffers with migraines and I have epilepsy, so we thought that we would collaborate – the two are closely linked and often have the same triggers. She wrote the poems; we both embroidered the garments. The words are personal testaments: they describe living with epilepsy, the adjustments to my lifestyle, and ongoing research that we have undertaken to help me to stay as well as I can.

It is important to educate people about epilepsy so that there is more understanding about living with this hidden disability. Through these poems, my mother and I want to bring it out into the open so people are not ashamed to talk about it. The final poem relates to the fact that although I have always been open about my epilepsy, no one seemed to take it seriously until I had two grand mal seizures this year.

We worked out the rough positioning of the text on paper before sketching it out in pencil on the garments. We embroidered some of the words using larger lettering, and in different stitches or colours, to emphasise their significance. We used backstitch and chain stitch, as well as whipped running stitches to give different effects.

fuck it — *Lesley Hagon*

These are my son's words. I was struck by his resilience and stoicism and I wanted to embroider them. He takes his medication, never allows himself to run out and gets on with his life.

headache — *Sally-Anne Parker*

I have lost a very close family member to epilepsy and found the testimony extremely powerful. Five words in particular resonated with me: *seizure*, *aching*, *burnt out* and *sleep*. I emphasised them to express the path of a seizure through the body, finally leaving the aftermath of *headache*. I took the phrase *burnt out* literally and used a soldering iron to scorch the letters into the fabric.

The use of ultraviolet threads gave the work an extra dimension. Not only would they glow under black light but they'd manifest the electronic impulses that sear through the brain. My ideas for the brain and the word *headache* were influenced by this impression of radiant electricity.

Working on dissolvable fabric, I portrayed the brain's surface by building its folds and creases in freehand machine stitch. This was worked in ultraviolet yarn to radiate light and show the brain's activity during a seizure, while the machine stitches illustrate the pathways and filigree network of a nervous system.

invisible — *Sarah-Cate Blake*

The words were written by the mother of a son with epilepsy. They were so honest, so heartfelt; I was determined to respect her experience.

The use of ultraviolet meant that the embroidery was to be visible and yet invisible, much as epilepsy is only sometimes apparent. To begin, I wrote out the text in fluorescent pen across the entire Victorian nightgown, my embroidery canvas. I could then work in a set of colours and stitch types rather than doing it sequentially. I tried to rationalise the text, sorting through a typography and colour scheme to match the nuances of each of the groups of words. For all the challenging, painful words I used a simple black stitch, often a functional running stitch. The conjunctives seem to require legibility and again I used a simple running stitch. But for the words associated with epilepsy I used the fluorescent threads, knowing these would become visible to the viewer only under ultraviolet light. I chose a flowing thin line, like the feeling I used to experience as a young woman suffering migraines, with a more elaborate back stitch and a typeface that seemed more calligraphic. It was hard: my eyes struggled to see the fluorescent thread; the task seemed to entwine me.

My word for the back was *invisible*. I created a small black set of tight running stitches, like a tattoo, with a flourishing finish so it would sit on the nape of the wearer's neck. I imagine that with long hair they could again render themselves anonymous, invisible. But I also covered the entire back of the gown with fluorescent pen, free writing the word over and over so it would shine out, like the spirit of the mother and her son.

isolated — *Tracy Duddridge*

Every sentence was a powerful account of living with epilepsy; I wanted them to stand alone and together. Using different coloured threads enabled each to take centre stage in different lights but also be seen with the others. To place the text,

I hand wrote onto the garment with an embroidery pen before hand embroidering over the top using backstitch. I deliberately didn't go for a perfectly uniform font: the testimony was full of emotion and I wanted that to come through. It was important that the word *isolated* on the back showed up in all lights, so I combined all the different threads in a variety of stitches.

lonely — *Frances Mänz*

My garment was a delicate Victorian chemise. I came to think of it as the body of the person having a seizure and then feeling like he's been in the ring with Mike Tyson; I was embroidering how he felt.

I designed the words by drawing them out on squared paper and transferring them to the garment. The front became the brain, so I used spiked lettering to represent the electricity activity it suffers during a seizure. Wrapped threads around the letters represent further brain damage. I chose overlaid blanket stitch using all the colours to denote the formation of the brain and the various parts affected. On the back *lonely* spoke volumes, as if my 'body' was shouting it out. To draw attention to the word, I decided to isolate each letter and make it as large as possible.

looms — *Pennie Marsden*

Our granddaughter Evie, who is fourteen, wrote these words about her epilepsy. She was diagnosed with epilepsy in 2018 and has suffered periodic seizures since then. It has taken a while to find a medication balance to control the seizures, and this is still ongoing.

I hand stitched Evie's words in full on the front of the garment. On the back, I took the word *looms* to reflect her sense of foreboding, with the oo as the eyes she becomes aware of looking down at her after a seizure. I selected a mix of stitches to form the letters and eyes so they would stand out in both normal and ultraviolet light and be easily read. I used chain stitch, whipped back stitch, cross stitch and buttonhole stitch, interweaving each type to make the best under both types of light.

misfires — *Griselda Goldsbrough*

I wanted to use that feeling on the garment. I drew the up and down motion of the words in light pencil, working quickly to

capture their movement and drama. 'I decided to take some dirt and grow a beautiful flower from it' really connected with me visually; I tried it tumbling down and growing up from the bottom of the garment. I used back stitch mostly to contain the words, weaving in and out with the ultraviolet threads which would illuminate alongside the blue-green colour palette. It was a slow process which I enjoyed, threads spilling out and round and through, sitting with people I love, stitching.

nauseous — *Macarena Rioseco*

On this piece I developed the design of another embroiderer who was unable to complete it. My contribution was to embroider lines on the back of the garment using black thread and the yellow ultraviolet. The lines represent the traces captured by an EEG of the brain's electrical activity during a seizure; they light up with the fluorescent thread and appear as a scar with the black thread. I used both hand cross-stitching and a sewing machine. One is the oldest form of embroidery, found all over the world; the other points towards technological and mechanical advances. Combining a traditional technique and a newer one, each with its particular historical and aesthetic values, brings richness to a simple, minimalist composition.

nic's painting — *Elsa Searle Vincent*

The garment was a christening gown and the testimony was written by someone's mother, so it was very emotional for me. On the back is a picture that her daughter drew, who has epilepsy; on the front are the mother's words. She is talking about her child on a christening gown; that pulled on my heartstrings. Certain words I have embroidered brighter because they stick out to me: she has had epilepsy since she was four years old, so I've made a larger letter which is Bondawebbed onto the robe and then stitched over. She is fifty now so I thought that was really important. And then the words 'psychosis', 'epilepsy', 'voices' and 'seizure' I've done with larger stitches as I just felt they needed to be bigger. I worked really intuitively with the garment, and what they were saying.

overloading — *Karen Butti*

I wanted the text to be hand-written to reinforce its personal nature so I began by painting it

with a large brush on a life size template of the garment, grouping the sentences for emphasis and selecting keywords to be highlighted in fluorescent yellow to convey the overall meaning when the natural light changed to ultraviolet. Then I traced the letters onto the garment and stitched them at a scale that I hope will enable them to be read when the installation is complete.

The band of dots across the centre represents the buzzing, but also suggests electrical patterns under ultraviolet light. The use of the different colours to conceal and reveal messages gained significance as I discovered when talking about the project to friends. I thought I knew no one with epilepsy; it emerged that several friends and their family members do in fact have it.

I empathised with the word for the back: *overloading*. It lent itself to an ever-increasing cascade of separately machine embroidered letters, each step forward adding to the burden but not necessarily obvious to the eye.

The font is Doves which I have used in several textile pieces in the past. It connects to my architectural conservation work at the homes of Emery Walker and William Morris, and thence to Morris's daughter Jenny whose whole life was marked by epilepsy. A small hand stitched wave pattern in the hem of my garment replicates a pattern she embroidered for her father, but it's secondary to the powerful narrative of the main text.

overwhelming — *Rebecca Offredi and Lucy Tiley*

We decided to start with black work which is usually done in black thread on white even-weave, but we did it in the ultraviolet thread. We wanted to convey that you try and hold things together but sometimes they break apart when you are a bit overwhelmed, so we started off with a traditional even centre and then it kind of fades out towards the edge. And we mixed up different size patterns as well to try and show that when you are overwhelmed it is difficult to keep everything on an even keel. Then we used Embird for the paragraph over the top to emphasise some of the words we felt were particularly powerful in the testimony. We broke the text up in between the patterns as we didn't want it all to be too rigid. Down the back we have the single word with more extensions of the black work patterns. We wanted the text to look fairly

plain under normal light, and the focus to be on the words, but when the light changes to ultraviolet we want the nightdress to look like it is exploding. The black work looks a bit molecular or like DNA or neuron patterns which connects with the art and science aspect. We wanted to give it another layer. We used my handwriting as we wanted it to be personal and organic. We wanted to give the nightdress a personality.

persistent — *Sumi Perera*

Mallarmé said: 'Everything in the world exists in order to end up in a book'. I thought about this for my design. I saw the front of the blouse as an opened book: a double spread. The buttons were the gutter between two pages, the right and left side the recto and verso of two pages. On the back I put one word across the spine of the human body to represent the spine of a book. I used a backstitch as it's two steps forwards and one step back, unlike the illness which is often one step forward and two steps back – especially when it becomes resistant to treatment.

resilient — *Hollie Phillips*

I loved how the writer said that epilepsy had empowered her, made her brave, strong and resilient. So for the stitching I used a strong, heavy outline. I did a split stitch on the outside so that when I went to fill in certain letters it would hold strong, wouldn't move or adjust on the fabric. It would be steady and sturdy.

The testimony I was given really sat strong with me because my mother's cousin Melanie had epilepsy. My mother always used to say that even though her cousin might have had a bad morning, when she used to go and see her in the afternoon, she never knew. She would be told later in the day that Melanie had had a bad day, but my mum never knew because she would go on with life as normal – because that was her life and she was always happy anyway. I am very glad to be part of this project because everyone is the same and there is something so empowering that we are embroidering onto underwear. Here it is for all the world to see, even in darkness because of the ultraviolet threads. It is lovely.

robbed — *Nina Beadnell*

I felt sad for all that had been taken away from this person by epilepsy. The design is based

on the face of a woman by Matisse that summed up how I felt. In natural light she is crying because the tear is in blue, but when the ultraviolet light comes on she is no longer crying. She looks stronger and more determined not to let epilepsy control her. I used satin stitch and back stitch.

safe — *Delyth Bolt*

I thought about the visual pattern of EEG scans and of the Victorian ruching patterns on dresses, and decided on strong but uneven letter shapes, jagged and rhythmic, representative of bodily movements during a seizure. I sewed straight, angular stitches slightly out of line using black thread, and electric zigzags to connect the lines of text with ultraviolet thread.

self-esteem — *Cheryl Penna*

It was a little daunting to be asked to embroider onto a real piece of antique linen and I wanted to make sure I didn't make too many mistakes. I had not used luminous thread before either. So to begin I practised on a scrap piece of fabric, experimenting with layout, stitches and threads.

It was a long text and I decided to fill the whole front of the garment with it, using Segoe Script in pitch 66. I don't normally use this but it has a good handwritten effect and the letters flow well together. They aren't overly fancy and should be easy to read. I felt the last three words – 'I have epilepsy' – needed to stand out so I made them larger and embroidered them by hand using black thread in stem and back stitch.

On the back I used thick black thread and couched down the thread for each letter using the luminous yellow. I just drew it free hand.

side effects — *Marie Keen*

I decided upon a mixture of hand and machine embroidery, starting the first line with large hand stitched words placed unevenly along the garment. I used two strands of threads, and as I finished each letter I went over the stitches with a whip stitch to emphasise it. The rest of the text was done by machine using the lettering stitches built into my machine; this took some time as each word had to be sewn and spaced separately. I used the same blue thread throughout except for two words in the yellow. I chose to do the words in a small size as I wanted people to have to move

closer to read them; that way the words would have more impact. I kept the piece very simple without any pattern or graphics.

stop — *Natasha Everard*

My main aim was to keep the design simple and ensure that as many people as possible could see and read the words. I chose split stitch to create a denser line and seamlessly blend the stitches together to give a natural, handwritten feel to the text while still keeping it clear and readable within the installation. The brain-waves in between the lines of words create a subtext about the unseen impact of epilepsy on the person.

stressed — *Rosie Millard*

The words were more about the emotional side of epilepsy and the struggle of having over a hundred seizures a day. It really struck me – I didn't realise that was even possible. For *stressed* I cut up the letters I had made – to fragment them – because I know when I'm stressed my brain goes into a hundred million pieces. So I was going to break the letters up and then embroider them onto the back of the garment. On the front I embroidered a long testimony and highlighted the important words. The front is all sewn in ultraviolet thread so it will show up under ultraviolet light, and then I went around the edge of the word *stressed* in black so that it will be seen in both lights. The ultraviolet really makes a difference – gives it a pop.

stuck — *Katerina Boyadjieva*

I taped pieces of paper together and cut them to the shape; then I wrote the whole text on the paper and started playing around with font, size, colour etc. I love showing actions through typography, so I really enjoyed embroidering *explode* as I had the opportunity to be creative and free with placing the letters.

sudep — *Penny Maltby*

I was conscious of being able to plan how the design would turn out – unlike those who might have a seizure at any time. I decided to make the words simple and clear, using both hand and machine stitching. These are made at very different speeds. Hand stitching goes at a slower, more mindful pace that allows time for reflection. Machine stitching is intense and fast, easy to make an error and

hard to unpick without causing irreversible damage to the garment. It made me think of the unpredictability, the difficulties and worries of those who live with epilepsy.

torment — *Bethan Morris*

I decided to use a French knot stitch to embroider neon dots in a grid pattern on the back of the garment. I used this technique to try and replicate one of the symptoms of an aura, often described as a warning before a seizure is about to happen, and to depict the sense of flashing lights or seeing dots that can precede a tonic-clonic seizure – the type described in the testimony. Coupled with this, the technique helped emphasise the word *torment* that I embroidered in large letters using running stitch.

uncertain — *Jill Mueller*

It was a long text and I was worried about the amount of time it would take to hand stitch, so I kept things as simple as possible. I wrote the words on tracing paper so that I could cut and move them about, changing the colour and size until I had a layout and flow that felt right. The Victorian nightdress felt too precious to handle until I was completely certain of the design. But once I began, my fingers itched to hold it in my hands and stitch each day. The embroidery was a mix of a split stitch and a straightforward back stitch.

understanding — *Melanie Kyles*

I felt very connected to the woman who wrote this: it is such an honest and unfiltered account of her personal experience. I focused solely on her words, using a simple backstitch to ensure the text was bold and legible, like direct speech with pauses (spaces) and emphasis (changing the embroidery colour) as would happen in natural conversation. To highlight the word *understanding* I stitched it in bold capitals in the most black-light reactive thread, to make sure it would 'pop' during the exhibition.

unnoticeable — *Florence Collingwood*

I wrote these lines based on my daughter's experience. She had just been in hospital for tests for possible epilepsy having recently been diagnosed with an autism spectrum condition, and I hope the words reflect her feelings rather than my own. She would

have moments, sometimes not even a second in length where she felt not there, where she seemed absent, disconnected; she would often ask, 'Am I here, or in a dream?' or 'Was that real?'

The designing and stitching helped me to process the diagnoses. For the embroidered text I used my own handwriting, as it was a personal interpretation of my daughter's words. The threads left hanging represent things not finished or completed as well as the messiness of our brains, the neurons that look a bit like lots of threads and wires. Some of the more poignant words are fluorescent but using trailing stitch for the words allowed me to leave gaps for other coloured threads to peek through, emphasising the wobbles and mix that perhaps goes on in our brains.

It was a great process to go through on a personal level but it was also challenging to use threads and colours that I wouldn't normally use in my own embroidery. Perhaps this added extra expression to the discomfort I had already described in the words.

winner — Tania Chant

I wanted my embroidery to reflect both the positive tone of the testimony, and my own love of handwriting. I made a few sketches of the Victorian chemise with different layouts of the text and then just went for it using an embroidery hoop and the sewing machine on the freehand embroidery setting.

withdrawal — Alison Beadnell

I have very little personal experience of epilepsy and found this testimony very moving. I wanted to understand what having a seizure actually feels like and somehow to evoke this. I researched descriptions of the experience of seizures – light auras, feelings of electricity, waves and dizziness, being caught up in a whirlwind. The ultraviolet lighting and fluorescent threads helped me express different sensations. The yellow in particular is very subtle in natural light but completely takes over in ultraviolet. I used it to portray the seizure feelings so that the aura, lightning and waves are all highlighted with the ultraviolet. The whirlwind of living with epilepsy is stitched in blue as it is always there in the background. I portrayed the person experiencing all this as floating limply, being held in one place, neither struggling nor escaping, just existing. I broke

the text into points and centred it along the lightning, with the words *medication, epilepsy, seizures* and *withdrawal, emphasised and connected*.

For the word on the back – *withdrawal* – my embroidery hinted at the waves of nausea and circulatory tingling that some describe when going through the process. Withdrawal could be perceived as negative because of these effects but I preferred to think about its positive aspect. That's how the testimony comes across: despite all that epilepsy brings with it, the writer is determined to deal with whatever comes her way in the next phases of her life.

I used a variety of stitches: blanket stitch for the aura, running stitch for the whirlwind and text, open single chain stitches for the waves, couching for the floating person, and seed stitch for the tingling on the back. The orderliness of the embroidered text is in stark contrast to the reverse of the work. I really like the back of the work as a pure record of the techniques of stitch creation, the knots and hidden chaos, and the beauty that is found there.

wizardry — Jayne Shipley

I wrote this poem about my daughter. Rosie had seizures when she was ten and again when she was twelve. She never received a formal diagnosis of epilepsy despite several days of prolonged seizures on both occasions. Rosie has been hospitalised many times in her life because of other health conditions, but these were by far the most traumatic. I feel as though I remember every single second of them, while Rosie seems to remember random moments. I was the omniscient observer, watching over her, watching others care for her and making decisions on our behalf.

The poem aims to convey the paradox of eerie stillness and calm against the internal chaos in the brain, and the drama of the hospital scene. I tried to complement this idea with my embroidery: using a basic running stitch to imply an innocent and child-like state and the stillness as her body calmed, I then embellished key words to reflect the chaos. I invented stitches to create 'knotted hair', and this was a very poignant part of the process for me. Rosie's hair was matted for weeks. Even when she had recovered, her hair was still telling the story of what had happened.

I stitched stars and used simple seed stitches to try and

invoke some magical aspect, to create some 'wizardry'. In truth, I wished I could have spent the rest of my days on this part of the text. I would have loved to have had the time to sew thousands of stars into the nightgown. I struggled with French knots but thrived on the challenge of making bead-like stitches to resemble the pads placed on the scalp during an EEG.

I made a sample garment to practise my stitches and help with the size and placing of each word, and chose to highlight pronouns, nouns and noun phrases in yellow, and verbs in blue. The prototype was embroidered relatively quickly using standard threads. However the ultraviolet threads were tricky to work with on the nightgown itself, and I didn't always achieve the finish I wanted. Perhaps the flaws and imperfections will add to its charms.

wooliness — Rosie McKellar

I studied pharmacology and my design was partly inspired by stylised diagrams of the nerve cells that transmit information around the body. My choice of stitches responds to these, and I wanted some parts to be more visible under ultraviolet than others. The testimony describes feeling like the brain is switched off, so on the front of the garment I broke it up and fractured the sentences.

For the word *wooliness* on the back I stitched the large end of a nerve cell instead of the letters oo because cells are sort of round with a central nucleus. I did it in back stitch to allow the design to twist and turn more easily. The other letters are also in back stitch but filled with herringbone stitch. I wanted something that wasn't solid, to shift and flex as the garment moved – just like people do.

We don't usually see the workings of the brain so my design in some ways reflects this. On both sides of the garment I have added several stylised nerve endings – this is where the signal passes from one nerve cell to another. I used white fabric that I knew was reflective under ultraviolet on the white garment but less easy to see in normal light. In the diagrams there are usually little circles that represent the signal so I chose a fabric that had circles on it. The circles are usually shown passing over to a structure on the next nerve cell and these look very like the fly stitches I have used.