

Pictures: Alexander Caminada



Laura Mirjami Rusanen in her studio in Stroud ahead of the International Textile Festival

The coats of many colours



Weaver Sarah Beadsmoore makes incredible coloured creations; below left, felt artist Sarah Brooker; below right, garment designer Dorothy Reglar at New Brewery Arts

COATS in a multitude of bright colours made from material from Stroud's last working textile mill will take pride of place at this year's International Textile Festival.

Fashion students from Somerset took inspiration from the town's architecture, countryside and culture to produce the jackets from woollen cloth supplied by Lodgemore Mills. It's the only working mill still producing cloth that's used worldwide for tennis balls and snooker table baize.

This year, the coats will be hung in shops in the town centre to highlight the biggest festival of its kind in the UK.

Started six years ago by arts worker Lizzi Walton, the SIT festival has become larger and more impressive every year, with exhibitors and visitors coming from across the globe.

But while the focus of the festival remains very much a local thing, the aim is to bring to the attention of people the importance and amazing diversity of textiles.

From woollen coats to amazing abstract enamel work, Stroud International Textile Festival is putting the Five Valleys on the map, as **HELEN BLOW** discovered

And it's not all about material. This year the 'textiles' include wood, paper and metal too.

Stroud's Five Valleys have a long association with cloth production and the influence of the textile industry can still be seen on the surrounding landscape and architecture today.

SIT continues that story and champions traditional and contemporary textile art and craft experiences.

This year's festival – which runs from today until May 22 – promises an exciting and stimulating programme of exhibitions, talks, workshops, events, performance and opportunities for debate and discussion.

It has attracted leading names from the international world of textiles such as Dutch artist **Tilleke Schwarz**, who stitches maps of modern life that look a bit like graffiti, and up-and-coming artist **Debbie**

Smyth, who stretches a network of threads between accurately-plotted pins.

Debbie's work blurs the boundaries between fine art drawings and textile art, flat and 3D work and illustration and embroidery.

Innovation comes from artist and jeweller **Jessica Turrell**, whose chosen medium is vitreous enamel, with which she creates delicate veils of words.

Lizzi is excited about having pieces from the late textile artist **Jane Edgar**, who designed fabrics printed for celebrated department store Heals both pre and post-war, as well as Gerald Holton, which was a forerunner to Habitat.

"We also have **Sophie Horton**, who has been commissioned to create site specific work around Stroud," said Lizzi. "Sophie knits and crochets and she will make a dramatic art work that will transform the town.



"We're not yet sure what she will come up with but it is sure to make passers-by stop and look, and give the festival a bigger profile."

The Museum in the Park is the main venue for exhibitions, but there is also a Textile Trail around the studios of local artists during the weekend of May 7 and 8.

These will include a peek inside the studio of **Matthew Harris**, who creates abstract imagery through dyeing, cutting and hand stitching, and Thrupp artist sisters **Gemma and**



Victoria Sangwine, whose lovingly handmade fashion and interior accessories are made from vintage, remnant and recycled fabrics.

"This year more than ever one senses that the 'buzz' around textiles is growing," says Lizzi.

"The festival not only celebrates the industry but it also brings visitors into the town, supporting the hotels, bed and breakfasts, shops and cafes."

■ For more details, pick up a brochure from town venues or visit www.stroudinternationaltextiles.org.uk