

## **Gail Baxter**

Gail's craft heritage is in bobbin lace but as a contemporary lacemaker she has broken free of traditional constraints. For Gail, the term 'lace' does not require the use of specific techniques or stitch patterns, it is perhaps best summed up as 'a pattern of constructed holes, random or geometric as the subject requires and constructed in whatever medium is most appropriate.

Her work centres on the way in which absences in museum archives affect the reading of craft objects in museums. As part of her research she is defining an archive as: any collection of material that has been withdrawn from its normal circulation and stored for potential future reference. In the archival process it is rare for all of the available material to be retained, filtering takes place on many levels, and thus information gaps occur. By questioning the influence of such absences Gail aims to encourage the development of critical questioning and stimulate debate on the interpretation of museum objects. Whilst the content of an established archive may be static its interpretation may vary. Exhibition curators can offer a specific reading of an object through their chosen text and contextual positioning but this may be subject to reinterpretation based on the experiences, tacit knowledge and agenda of the audience.

Gail's practice is inextricably linked with absences – holes, gaps, voids, lacunae – it is the absences that give lace its distinctive identity. The lacemakers skill lies in effectively drawing together, and interlinking, many individual threads to form a coherent whole around the absences that are the essence of the fabric. Gail is applying these skills to lace archives; identifying the absences drawing together hints and clues, and adding information from specialist sources to give form to the voids and facilitate new readings.