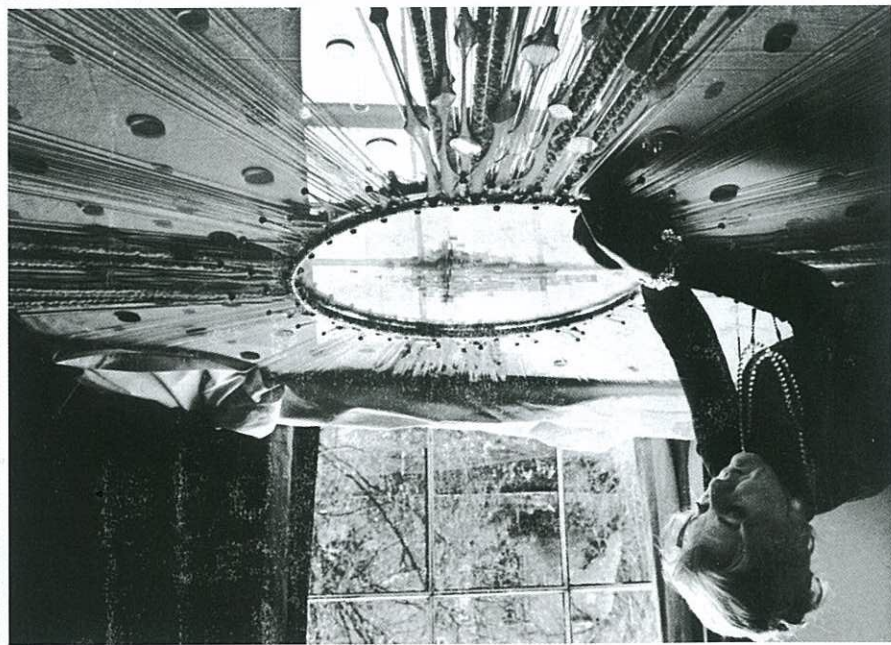


a history of creativity

After writing several books on textile design and production, Irene Waller's eighth title gives a fascinating account of life as a working designer and artist in the latter half of the 20th century



'MISS CARTER, YOU WILL DO embroidery and weaving.' These were the words that closed the doors of the painting school. At the same time they opened up a life filled with a diversity of textile activities to a young woman about to commence her third year of study at art school in the late 1940s. Irene Waller (née Carter) was later to head the Department of Constructed Textiles at Birmingham College of Art and her passionate advocacy of an informed, supportive and encouraging system of textile education is witnessed not only by her many years of teaching and lecturing, but also by the seven 'how to' books she wrote on topics that included knots and netting, tating and weaving. Having been assigned to the so-called 'women's crafts', Waller comments that the delight characterising the preceding two years of general art studies started fading, not because of the subjects themselves, but as a result of how weaving and embroidery were required to be taught. Although the latter 'was carried on in a more congenial atmosphere than weaving' she remembers how the stylised figure, sharp-angled, abstract shapes era of the late 40s' which typified much of the contemporary embroidery did not encourage a passionate response in the teenaged needlewoman. Nevertheless, she achieved National Diplomas in Design with distinctions in both the crafts, which were to play so significant a role in her life. The influence of Scandinavian design in the applied arts was extremely vigorous in the middle decades of the 20th century, and a study visit to Sweden in 1947 was a revelatory experience for Waller. There she made first-hand acquaintance with natural-dyed textiles in spinning and weaving centres, so very different from the

Irene Waller at work on a mural for the New Community Church, Welley Castle
Right: Irene Waller, detail of wallhanging for the exhibition at the Edinburgh Festival 1970. Threads between Pespex sheets

