

ADVENTURES IN MAKING A LACE COMMUNITY

by Jane Atkinson

A world apart, yet in constant touch, a new bobbin lace community is rewriting what it means to make art: generating innovation not in lonely isolation but in the proximity of inspiring comrades. Because there is no arts institution in the world where one can major in lace, lace artists have had to do it for themselves.

Makers from across the globe have for the past five years congregated monthly, in two time zones, on Zoom in an explosion of creativity known as **The Adventurous Lacemakers**. TAL mentors publish original contemporary courses, with the culmination being “Masterclass,” supported by a lively private Discord forum, where members present creative dilemmas, question assumptions and support each other through uncertainty.

Results have been astonishing. Some members arrived as novices and graduated as international artists.

TAL Masterclass was founded by **Pierre Fouché** from Cape Town in 2020, after the pandemic changed everything. “The idea grew out of a moment of quiet surprise,” he remembers. “In 2019, while teaching improvised approaches to traditional Binche lace in New Jersey, I was asked for feedback by a lacemaker who brought along a portfolio of her work. Her

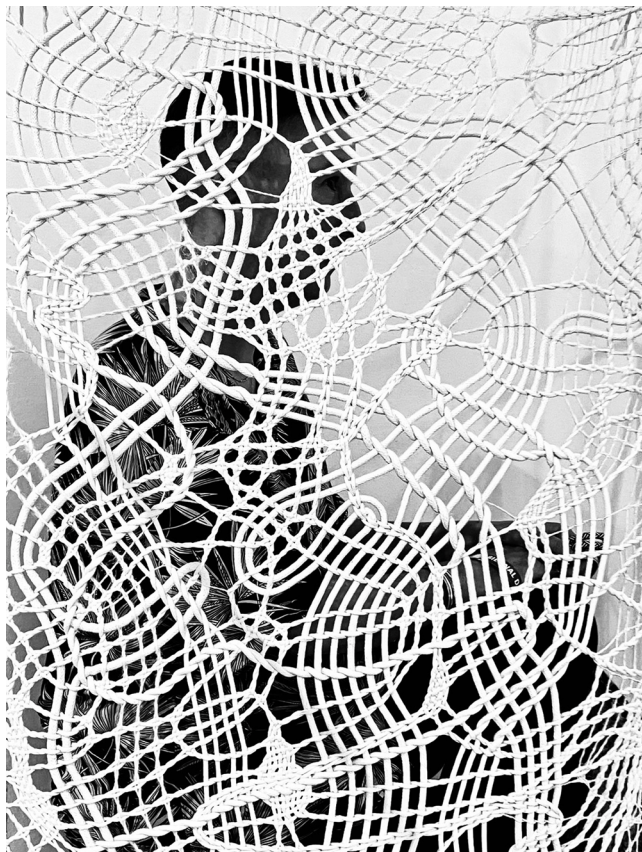
Tina Koder Grajzar, *A Lace Journey Through The Legends of Spodnja Idrija*, 2024. Bobbin lace, 5-pair narrow cloth stitch, double stitch, half stitch, plaits with linen thread no. 18 and cotton thread no. 30, 83 x 20 inches. Photo: Živa Marinko.

designs were impeccable, her technique faultless, yet she spoke with real uncertainty about her work.”¹

Fouché continued: “It made me realise how little space there was, within organised lacemaking, for conversation around design, experimentation, and creative confidence. The techniques are carefully preserved and taught—but the artistic questions often feel like something you’re meant to work out alone.”

Fouché had been through four years of university master’s level critiques in sculpture before he discovered lace, so knows how to conduct sessions in the gentlest and most inclusive manner. Participants come from all walks of life. Presentations are in English, and those with fluency translate for compatriots.

“Everyone is welcome, and everybody’s work is important,” says Glasgow arts graduate **Alex Slack**. “It feels informal and fun, yet we are serious about our work and sharing our discoveries. I found my tribe.”²



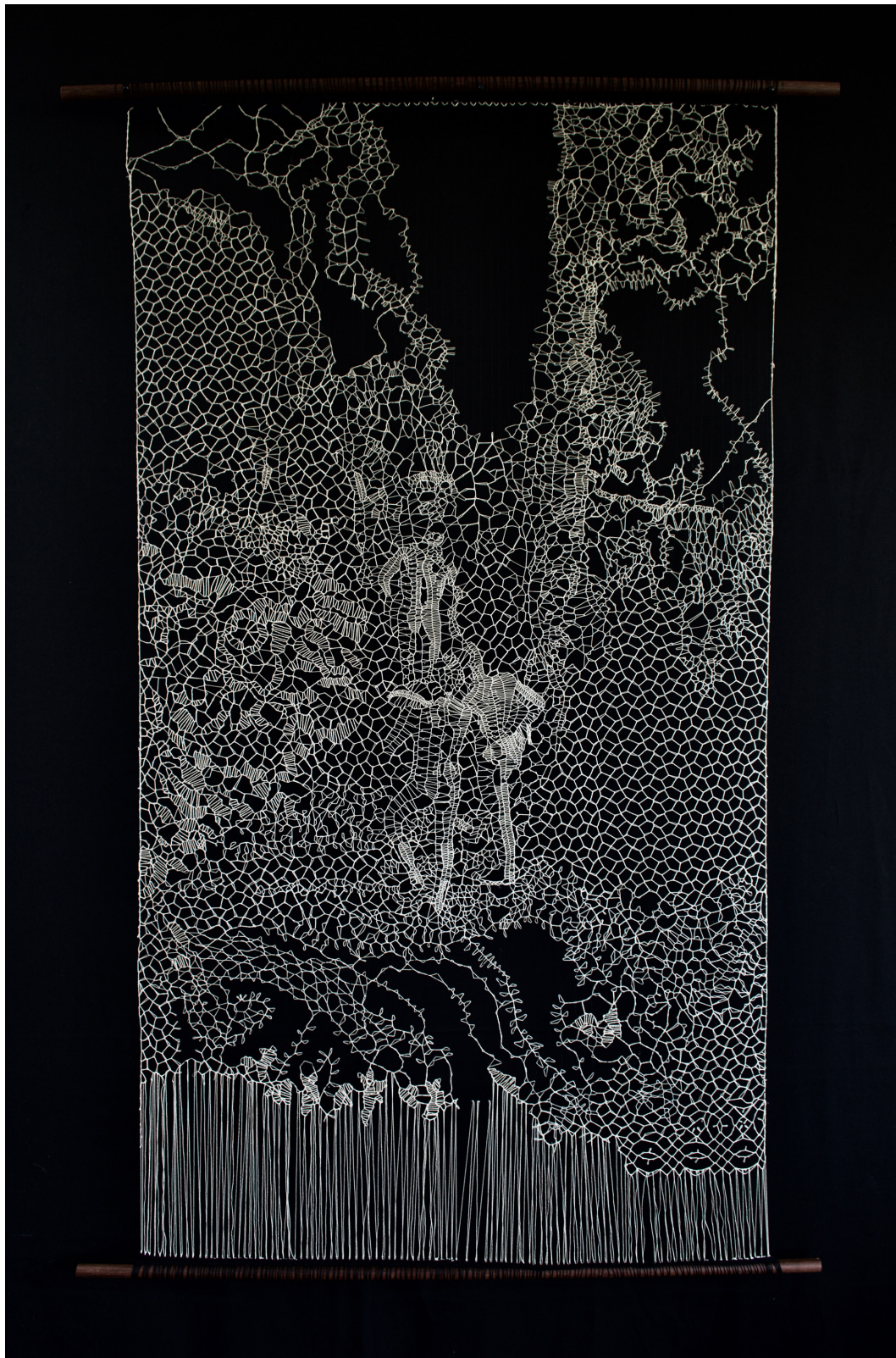
Joanne Newman, *Mutability Again*, 2025. Improvised bobbin lace with jute string, cotton cords, threads, strings and corde tressée, 24 x 49 inches. Photo: Marian Lili.

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For **Joanne Newman** from Colchester, England, who holds a master’s in fine art, “It has helped me to re-engage in a totally different way with something I loved doing as a child and provided me with a renewed momentum and accountability for my artistic practice. I feel ambitious and excited about my work all over again.”³



Cordula Pröfrock, *not invited*, 2024. 2-4 pair lace technique, braided lace and Idrija lace with linen, cotton and effect yarn, 27.5 x 19.6 inches. Photo by the artist.



Pierre Fouché, *The Procession*, 2021. Bobbin lace with mercerised cotton, 47.25 x 23.6 inches. Photo by the artist.

For **Maria Jose Rosel** in Zaragoza, Spain, “Every session is a dose of energy for me. It is a window into a world of possibilities and an incentive to keep researching and experimenting with lace.”⁴

Artist and illustrator **Kat Steyn** from Johannesburg, South Africa, found “TAL not only demystified the techniques of bobbin lace but also introduced me to a supportive group that encourages artistic growth, excellence and playful curiosity.”⁵

Steyn entered lace via Fouché’s online *Art Lace for Absolute Beginners*, which distils early lessons from his fellow mentors **Dagmar Beckel Machyckova**, **Denise Watts**, and myself, **Jane Atkinson** in a course which starts from utter simplicity, using a process that was as much a revelation to Fouché as to anyone else.

“Dagmar’s ‘back to basics’ work in [the course] ‘Taking Your Thread For a Walk’ is an exploration of responsiveness to thread tension using just two bobbins which sparked a cascade of conversations and experiments,” Fouché says.

“Those eventually led to two major works in my own portfolio, ‘The Procession’ and ‘Privy to Mysteries.’ The resulting technique has become so transformed that it is no longer recognisable as bobbin lace. That leap is not something I could have planned or could have achieved alone.”

The freedom promulgated in TAL was just what author and lace artist **Cajah Reed** in Denver, Colorado, needed “to take my own skills further than I could have imagined. As my creative practice took shape, I started showing my work across the United States.”⁶

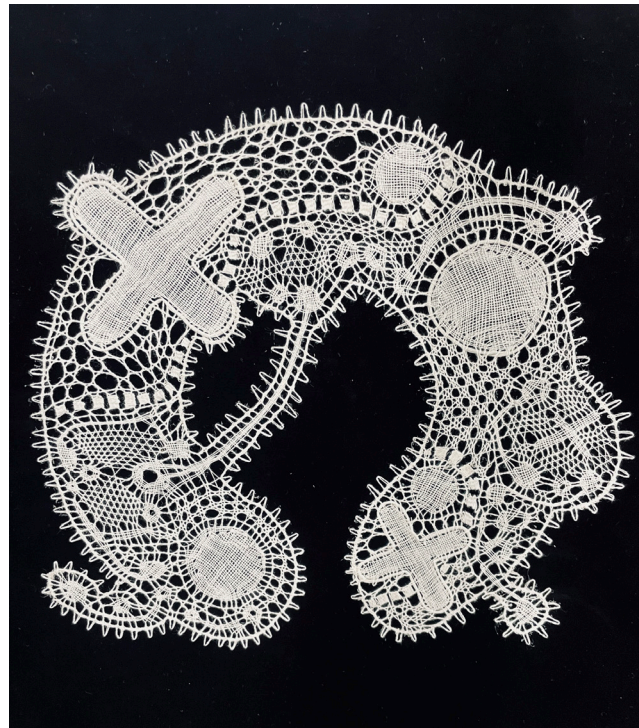
Belgian mentor and **Monumental Art** degree course graduate **Lieve Smets** finds “the joy of sharing the same nerdy passion: delving deeply into lace techniques, seeing its endless possibilities, and being inspired to make new things. Masterclass helped me articulate my process, shape my thoughts, and test them with others.”⁷

Fellow mentor **Tina Koder Grajzar**, a lacemaker in Idrija, Slovenia who studied fashion design, notes she “joined TAL in a period when my career was stagnating and it gave me a much-needed affirmation and encouragement to persevere. Looking back I can really say my lace journey consists of two parts: before and after TAL.”⁸

Mentors as well as members find it useful to present their own works-in-progress: feedback can prompt major alterations. Says **Olga Ieromina**, a Ukrainian IT specialist living in the Netherlands: “Preparation of my own presentation is a great moment to reflect on my work: what are my goals, what have



Lieve Smets, *Strange Things Are Happening In The Hive*, 2022. Bobbin lace with copper wire, silk and beeswax, 5.1 x 3.1 inches. Photo: Erchen Theys.



Madeline Thoman, *A Bobbin Lace Collar*, 2025. Bobbin lace with linen, 12 x 12 inches. Photo by the artist.



Olga Ieromina, *Scrolling*, 2025. Chantilly bobbin lace with cotton, linen and silk threads, 4.8 x 6.7 inches. Photo by the artist.

I achieved, what has happened in the last year? This is as important as feedback during the presentation itself.”⁹

After several years, Fouché realised that members should be encouraged to graduate with a major challenge, like setting up a portfolio website or holding a solo exhibition. Or perhaps just step back to open space for newcomers but still attend meetings.

For her part, **Maria Mercé Rovira Regas** founded the Girona Contemporary Lace Biennial. “TAL is a source of inspiration that has motivated me to value and understand my artistic ideas. This environment has helped me to put them into context, to make them feasible and, above all, to make them a reality,” she says.¹⁰

Cordula Präfroock, a computer scientist and lace artist near Stuttgart, Germany, admits: “Exchanging ideas and conversing with artists from a wide variety of cultures and backgrounds leads us to discover personal boundaries and rules of which we were not previously aware. Such boundaries can then be crossed.”¹¹

An influential work presented here is by retired software designer **Marian Tempels**, of Amersfoort, the Netherlands, “Railway bridge into the city” (2024). “The river and the sky are made with letters from my lace alphabet, saying ‘water’ and ‘lucht’ (sky). Without the encouragement of TAL and the Masterclass, the lace alphabet and this work would not have existed.”¹² Like Tempels, several TAL members with inventions of their own have now published them.

Madeline Thoman, an American artist living in Paris, came into lace during the pandemic, but has already exhibited her profoundly skillful improvisation in *Women Pulling at the Threads of Social Discourse, Don't be Absurd* exhibit at The Contemporary Art Modern Project in Miami.

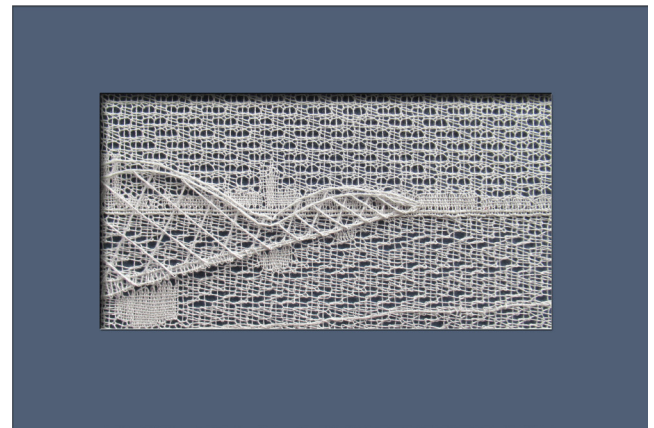
She says: “TAL represents a wealth of embodied knowledge and an online safe space where people share a love of lace, history and art. The support and passion I found as a beginner at TAL allowed me to start seeing myself as an artist, pushing me to get out of my comfort zone and start showing my work internationally.”¹³

Celeste Onorati from Seattle feels TAL has given her “the tools to think outside of the box when following a dream of an idea. I'm using sketching and sampling now, to explore the ‘what ifs’ and possibilities in my work. They've even encouraged me to use fire in one of my pieces, to my joy at the result.”¹⁴

¹Pierre Fouché, interview with author, online, December 16, 2025. All other quotes same source.

²Alex Slack, interview with the author, online, December 17, 2025.

³Joanne Newman, interview with the author, online, January 29, 2026.



Marian Tempels, *Railway Bridge into the City*, 2024. Contemporary lace with cotton, 7.25 x 3.87 inches. Photo by the artist.

⁴Maria Jose Rosel, interview with the author, online, December 19, 2025.

⁵Kat Steyn, interview with the author, online, December 22, 2025.

⁶Cajah Reed, interview with the author, online, December 29, 2025.

⁷Lieve Smets, interview with the author, online, December 29, 2025.

⁸Tina Koder Grajzar, interview with the author, online, December 29, 2025.

⁹Olga Ieromina, interview with the author, online, December 22, 2025.

¹⁰Maria Mercé Rovira Rosel, interview with the author, online, December 20, 2025.

¹¹Cordula Präfroock, interview with the author, online, January 26, 2026.

¹²Marian Tempels, interview with the author, online, December 17, 2025.

¹³Madeline Thoman, interview with the author, online, January 4, 2026.

¹⁴Celeste Onorati, interview with the author, online, January 2, 2026.

—As a founding partner of *The Adventurous Lacemakers (TAL)*, *Jane Atkinson (she/her)* exhibited as a guest of honour at the first *World Lace Festival in Slovakia, 2024*. An artist, author and tutor, she has exhibited in Europe and America and taught across the globe. Arts Council England backed her solo exhibition in 2018.

contemporarylace.com
theadventurouslacemakers.com
patreon.com/cw/theadventurouslacemakers

@jane.atkinson_contemporarylace
@theadventurouslacemakers