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Wonderful artistry that's right on the button

Intricate artworks made
famous by the royals

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For most artists, there is little hope of ever getting their work in front of 2.5bn people, even posthumously and over several decades. For sculptor Ann Carrington, just one of her pieces was the focus of that much attention on a single afternoon this June, when her now iconic Royal Jubilee Banner was seen hanging from the stern of the Royal Barge as it made its way along the Thames and the images were broadcast around the world as part of the coverage of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations.

"The process was similar to any other commission," explains Carrington. "I presented Photoshopped images with fabric and button samples, which had to be approved. In this case, I presented ideas to Prince Charles as he was interested in the actual process of making the banner."

Carrington's work is all about materials, detail and impact. Her customarily vast murals utilise all manner of recycled items. For her Manhattan Mettle piece, commissioned for a public space at the W Hotel in Hoboken, Carrington created a huge rectangular magnet and arranged found metal objects from docks, along with subway tokens and nickels, in the shape of an intricate New York skyline. "I take mundane, unremarkable objects and transform them into surprising, witty and hopefully beautiful artworks," she says. "The materials that I use are governed by the story I am trying to tell. I had a studio in Zimbabwe for a while and I was inspired to make something in the shape of elephant tusks. I used old ivory and bone-handled knives, which meant that the sculpture had a kind of cyclical story." Carrington's tusks are available to order from £9,500 (second picture).

From her present studio on the Kent coast, Carrington designs and constructs elaborate artworks for private clients who include Gwyneth Paltrow and the Duke of Westminster. Her sewn button pieces are in the Rothschild Collection and she has an ambassadorial role with the United Nations. "I was commissioned to make several pieces for the UN about slavery," she says. "I used chains as a medium for these sculptures."

The buttons she uses in her murals are all made exclusively for her, and dyed to her specifications. Some of the most popular pieces she has created are part of her Pearly Queens series (first picture, from £6,000), with coloured buttons sewn onto a crimson, or other coloured background to emulate the 1st Class Royal Mail stamp. "I'd always thought it was such a beautiful image, and yet so over familiar, so I decided to blow the stamp up, with bigger dimensions, with the buttons taking the place of printed dots."

Although this year's high-profile projects – the Pearly Queens and the Jubilee work (limited-edition giclee prints are available, from £265), a Union Flag collaboration with Lulu Guinness for two handbags and a Crown Jewels bag with Paul Smith – may have aligned Carrington with all things royal, her scope is international and diverse. She tailors imagery to every client and space. "Sometimes a client already has their own materials and I am asked to come up with visual ideas," she says. "That might be 1,000 golf clubs, or a tea chest of jewellery." Commissioned pieces start at £8,000.

