

# CYBERFLORA

## the internet mural

designed by

Victoria Cooper  
Sally L'Estrange  
Gillian Scott  
Janis Somerville  
Adrienne Williams  
and the GLENMORGAN ART GROUP

painted by

Lorraine Barnes  
Jane Bridle  
Edwina Coggan  
Victoria Cooper  
Fiona Crabbie  
Fiona Hill  
Cindy Grimes  
Gill Kidd  
Sally L'Estrange  
Elaine Lyons  
Carol McCormack  
Clare Mailler  
Nicole McGregor  
Penny Murphy  
Bob Nason  
Anna Parnell  
Mary Penfold  
Heather Reis  
Dorinda Schwennesen  
Garth Shaw  
Jan Shaw  
Veronica Vagg



The Glenmorgan Art Group (GAG) decided to paint a mural on the eastern wall of the Myall Park Gallery as a gift to commemorate Dave Gordon's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1999.

Various thought processes led to the idea of collaborating with other artists who were well-acquainted with the Garden. Investigations were made into the possibility of building a composite design on a purpose-built website. Funding was accessed from the Regional Arts Fund to purchase the necessary equipment - and Cyberflora was born.

This booklet documents some of the steps along the way to achieving the finished mural.

Carol McCormack,  
Cyberflora coordinator

Thanks to Chroma Australia  
for their kind donation of paint and sealer

We acknowledge our partners in the project:

Flying Arts Inc  
Indelta (University of Southern Queensland Technology)

for their valuable assistance

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### CYBERFLORA PROJECT

The small southern Queensland community of Glenmorgan has created a world first in the arts by designing an 11 metre wide mural over the internet.

It will be officially launched at a Festival in the spring.

Four years in the making, the project known as Cyberflora was initiated by the Glenmorgan Art Group as a way of involving former members and invited artists in the creation of a mural for the outside wall of the art gallery at the nearby Myall Park Botanic Garden.

Artists now living as far apart as Germany and Toowoomba used an email network to join current Glenmorgan artists in contributing to the design of the four metre high mural.

Coordinator Carol McCormack described the project as a totally new concept in creating artwork.

"It is a significant work of art for the region, and it has shown how isolated cultural communities can be part of a global environment," she said.

Fellow Cyberflora committee member Elaine Lyons calls the mural "art on a grand scale".

"It will certainly be another attraction to bring people to the area," she added.

The 132 hectare garden in which it's sited is best known as the home of the hybrid "Robyn Gordon" and "Sandra Gordon" grevilleas.

It features Australian flora from arid and semi-arid areas planted by horticulturalist Dave Gordon, and these naturally take pride of place in the mural which stretches along the wall of the gallery which houses Dorothy Gordon's collection of Australian wildflower paintings.

Tree trunks and the sun's rays are the "bones" upon which botanical artists, a photographer, graphic designer and visual artists have unleashed their creativity.

Pollen, the weather and the birds which are attracted to the region are some of the design elements which been meshed together to generate a stunning image at the bush retreat.

"People came here and just saw a big shed, and found it hard to believe there was an art gallery inside," Carol said, explaining how the idea got started.

"I thought we could give it a facelift in the guise of a mural."

The invited artists who took part in the project include Victoria Cooper, Sally L'Estrange, Gillian Scott, Adrienne Williams and Janis Somerville, all of whom have an involvement with the Garden in some way.

Sally and Gillian are both from south-east Queensland, each with a profound interest in botanical art.

Janis is a visual artist now living in Germany but she was a member of the Glenmorgan Art Group from 1970 to 1978.

Graphic design is Brisbane-based Adrienne's specialty and she includes the interpretative signage for the Garden in her CV.

Victoria, who is from Toowoomba, specializes in photography and has exhibited her work inside the gallery walls.

Artists currently living in the Glenmorgan district are represented in the mural as well, with local art group members contributing to one whole design area, using the bark patterns of the Leopardwood tree to give them a giant jigsaw layout.

They were also responsible for gridding the design template onto the gallery wall and transferring the images from the digital form to paint on the walls.

Many of the elements – intense cold and rainy days, drought and dust storms – have been encountered during the weekly painting sessions.

While creating designs that showcased their individual visions, all the artists had to dovetail their work to mesh with the images surrounding their own.

They posted messages and samples of their thoughts to a discussion forum on a website specially set up for the purpose ( [www.gag.org.au/](http://www.gag.org.au/) ), wrestling with computers and scanners in the process.

“Using a computer is a bit like learning to use a pencil all over again,” Janis commented.

Funding for the project has come from Arts Queensland and the Australia Council and was used to buy computer hardware and software, the setting up of a website, artist payments, and paint and scaffolding equipment.

Chroma Australia also donated \$150 worth of paint.

Major partners in the project are Flying Arts Inc, which provided administrative assistance, and INDELTA, the technology department at the University of Southern Queensland in Toowoomba, which played a key role in assisting with the technological aspects.

Carol says the project has brought a lot to the Glenmorgan community, such as familiarity with computer equipment, a long-term project that many people could have input to and pride in, and recognition by the Tara shire that the project is something to be proud of in the world of the internet.

## **GLENMORGAN ART GROUP AND THE INVITED ARTISTS**

The four and a half years from start to finish of Cyberflora have seen many changes in the lives of our artists. Several have moved away from our area, and new faces have arrived. Some have become parents, others grandparents. Health problems have intervened, careers have made their demands. It seemed to take forever to get moving on the digital design while we were sorting out the process and the website, but none of the key players pulled out, and all sections of the image were finally delivered ready for painting. This too took time, although we tried to paint once a week even on the hottest, coldest and dustiest days of the year. Slowly the image grew, and now all we can say is - enjoy!

**LORRAINE BARNES** worked through self-help books to arrive at a working knowledge of Photoshop and the digital camera. Luckily her move from our district happened AFTER she had designed and painted her section of the GAG trees! Her son Peter generously gave us a day of his Queensland holiday to share his knowledge of Photoshop with the Art Group

**JANE BRIDLE** moved away from our area some years ago, and participated by writing a poem expressing her memories of the garden. She made a special visit to paint her words around one of the GAG trees, and also painted the very top section of the tree from a composite design.

**LORRAINE CHIANCEY** contributed to many of our initial discussion sessions. Lorraine moved to another area while the project was still in its infancy and unfortunately does not have access to the internet.

**EDWINA COGGAN** was one of our hard-working Cyberflora committee members. She helped with equipment purchases, web-site design, botanical art workshop administration, and created some lively areas of the GAG trees in her own style which she painted for both the digital design and the wall. Edwina was also found helping with gridding, undercoating, sealing, and high up a ladder painting treetops. Since the middle of 2003, Edwina has been fully occupied with another major work, her son Heath.

**VICTORIA COOPER** and Doug Spowart are full time photographers and teachers. They are Photoshop experts and gave much help along the way with brain crushing problems like dpi and ppi, choosing file formats and resolution – it's certainly not their fault if **we** never became experts! Vicky used her exciting pinhole photographs taken in the Garden to create glimpses of favourite places between the large trees.

**FIONA CRABBIE** was out from Scotland on a working holiday and certainly didn't expect to find herself becoming a part of Cyberflora, but she spent two days with us painting weather sections and blocking in drawings.

**CINDY GRIMES** was a valuable contributor to our early design sessions but was simply too busy in a full time teaching job to join us with the painting stage. Her perky drawing of Avochie cottage surveys the mural from on high.

**FIONA HILL** is a new member of our group and more at home with blue prints than paint brushes. Fiona helped paint some of the weather sections and we would have seen much more of her if Cyberflora had been a more toddler-friendly environment.

**GILL KIDD**, the busy chairman of Myall Park Botanic Garden Ltd, is responsible for the Garden's Living Collection. She is a patchworker and claims she is not an artist, but we may make one of her yet! Gill took time off on one of her business visits to the Garden to paint weather sections.

**SALLY L'ESTRANGE** gave us a workshop on contemporary botanical art as part of the project. Plagued by a vindictive computer that crashed every time she thought about Cyberflora, she chose to drive from Brisbane on three separate occasions to paint her section straight onto the wall. We then photographed the result and incorporated it into the digital image. Sally's bold images of pollen grains viewed by electron-microscope run from left to right in the middle of the wall, and her two lower rays deal with insects, barks and ground cover plants painted with her own individual flair.

**NITA LESTER** is another member of our group who moved from the district during the Cyberflora period. Nita has remained in touch and contributed her part of the GAG design on disk as "fun squares" in Photoshop.

**ELAINE LYONS** was another of the supportive committee members who helped navigate the course of Cyberflora via seemingly endless meetings. Elaine organised the paint, arranged the writing workshop and had postcards printed of the completed mural. While in the throes of moving house she managed to paint some of her favourite plants of the Garden from her own Photoshop design, and later made a return trip to finish her work.

**CLARE MAILLER** and her children called in whenever passing on a painting day to spend some time with a paintbrush helping us complete the jigsaw.

**CAROL MCCORMACK** got us into this, and was responsible for posting the growing design on the website, keeping in touch with our invited artists and co-ordinating the painting process. Her crash course in self-help books was supplemented by cries of help to knowledgeable sources. Carol could be found at the mural site with brush in hand when anyone else was painting - and even at times when they weren't!

**NICOLE MCGREGOR & ANNA PARNELL** chanced to visit the Garden on one of our painting days and spent some happy hours with us making their mark.

**PENNY MURPHY'S** sound advice and sense of line, design and colour was invaluable from start to finish. Unfortunately her interest in digital photography and the wonders of Photoshop blossomed after the digital design stage was finished, however her contribution to the painting stage was immense. Her offer to mix colours for each of the "weather" segments greatly simplified the painting of these areas, and her eye for detail made easy work of painting the sinuous lines of Jan & Pip's trees.

**BOB NASON** has several outstanding murals to his credit, yet he says he found the task of "painting by numbers" quite a challenge! Bob opted out of the digital design stage, but has translated some of Vicky Cooper's garden landscape into glowing paint.

**MARY PENFOLD** says she has no interest in computer technology, but from the developing concept to the finishing touches she was always there to lend

a hand and practical advice. Mary painted anything and everything from the grid to the undercoat, from Gillian Scott's flowers to four coats of sealer.

**HEATHER REIS** is a supportive member of the group and joined us in many sessions from concept development through to painting. Heather's repertoire ranged from translating Nita's delicate butterflies to Janis's perky gecko.

**DORINDA SCHWENNESEN** is secretary of Myall Park Botanic Garden Ltd, and quietly gets on with a thousand other jobs as well, so it was no surprise to find her working away on some of the weather sections.

**GILLIAN SCOTT** has given several traditional botanical art workshops at Myall Park Botanic Garden over the years. During the project period she battled with a contrary computer and severe back problems, but delivered a delightful design which concentrated on the Garden's best-known flowers. As we scanned it into the digital design we sighed with relief at its cheerful simplicity as Gillian's back condition meant she was unable to clamber up the trestles to paint her own section in the faithful detail which has become her trademark.

**GARTH SHAW** came to the Garden for a Directors' meeting and made the mistake of offering to help! "Give me something simple" he said, and found himself with the important job of undercoating the signature strip.

**JAN SHAW** arrived in the district after we had embarked on Cyberflora but joined in enthusiastically. She is a meticulous painter and has done a wonderful job on some of the butterflies, fish and other "critters".

**JANIS SOMERVILLE**, a former GAG member, kept in touch from Germany via email and the website. The see-saw of timelines almost prevented her and Pip Cozens from delivering their "trees and critters" – when they were ready we were not, and when we were organised they had taken off to Africa on an assignment. Their three big trees were duly delivered for us to scan and paint, and create an imposing part of the overall design.

*Update – Sadly Janis died in 2005*

**VERONICA VAGG** is a new member of the group who joined us on our first painting day and helped paint Vicky Cooper's dark Lake areas. Veronica also found that working on Cyberflora was a real challenge for anyone with a toddler in tow!

**ADRIENNE WILLIAMS** uses Illustrator for her work as a graphic artist and was a wonderful help when we were devising the process, with some excellent advice on how to set up the grid and squares that all the digital submissions slotted into. Her design offering was brilliantly simple – a background depicting the varying weather patterns of our area, blazing sun, thunder-clouds, raindrops and roaring fire.

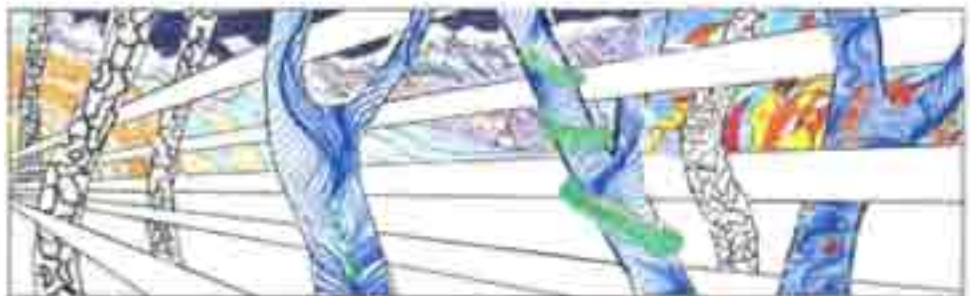
# The design concept grows from a faxed sketch



1. GAG's initial template for design, circulated to members by fax



2.



3.

2-5 The design concept grows - thumbnail sketches are posted to the website and combined



4.



5.

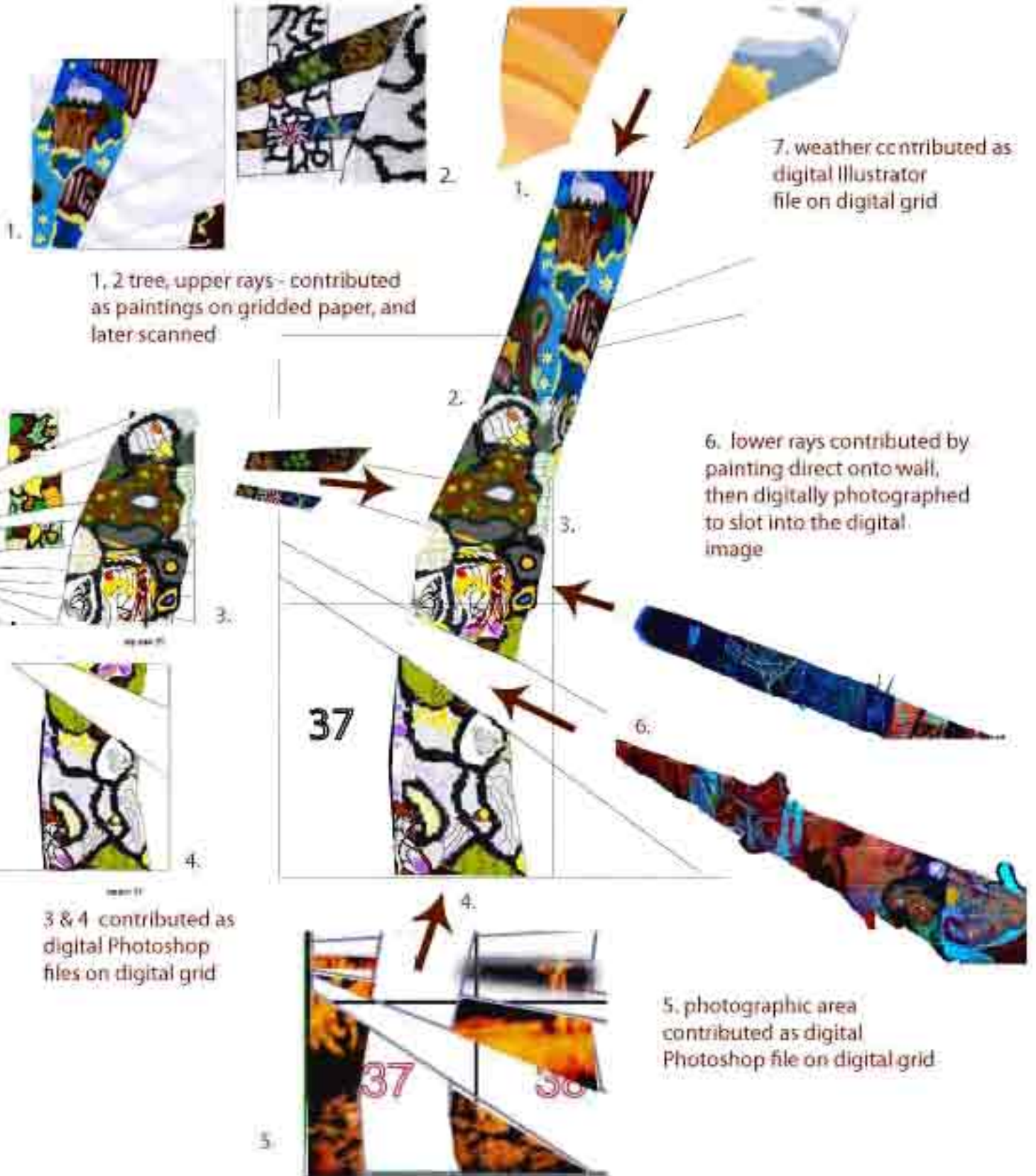


6.

6. First digital files posted to website

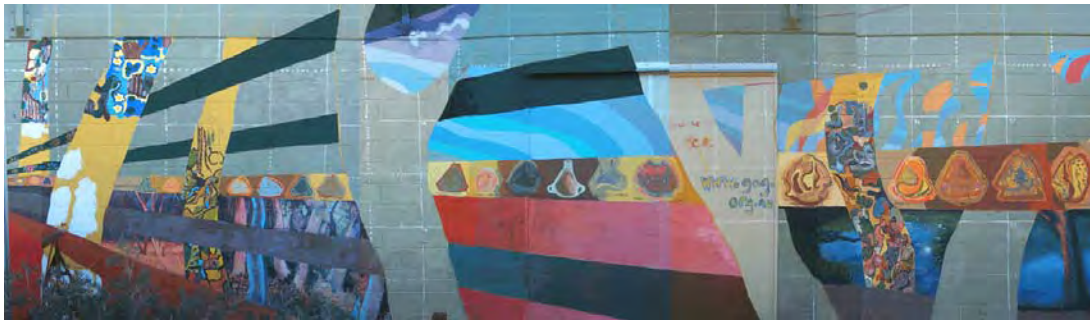


some of the steps in achieving a small section of the final digital image



# PUTTING IT ON THE WALL

First the grid. Then Sally L'Estrange's pollen ray, then some broad blocking in of colour, and so it grew, slowly.



## Opening address of Cyberflora August 30, 2003

*By Doug Spowart*

Although I am here to open the Cyberflora mural I also feel my presence is to represent the partners of all the participants in this project. My partner is Victoria Cooper, one of the internet artists.

A recent survey shows that more people every day engage in some arts based activity than any other leisure activity. Art is important to us. Few things in life can be as enduring as art ~ except maybe having children ~ thank you for your children!

Art brings together the community as witnessed by this gathering this evening. Art communicates and shares. Art provides meaning for life and enriches the lives of those who are connected with it. This mural is but part of the rich art based activity that is focussed in this community around this gallery.

This project is about connecting technology with the human need for communication through art. Although some Cyber artists indicated the verbal communication via the internet was difficult, the idea flow created by seeing the project grow, if slowly, became the means to the end that is before us today. These artists operated in a virtual world of grids and pixels as fleeting and ephemeral as the ideas behind the vision.

A design featuring 'rays of light through a forest' became the scaffold for each cyber artist to affix their vision. One by one elements were posted via the net and the jigsaw pieces began to fall into place. Being the partner of a participant I witnessed the anguish, frustration and joy that comes with resolving artistic challenges ~ the same experience no doubt took place before computers of artists and coordinators everywhere.

Disparate concepts became entwined in a bold tapestry of colour, form and shape. But the computer screen was the beginning of the project not the conclusion. As the cyber design phase ended, other artists, the Glenmorgan Art Group, took the 'painting by numbers' cyber grid and made the 'virtual' a reality in paint. The cyber artists who directed the process did so from afar most not even seeing one dab of paint on the wall.

Our world is constantly changing - new technologies provide new opportunities and artists are not alone in their need to integrate new skills and methods into their practice. Apart from the obvious product of the project being the mural itself, another important aspect is the professional development in the area of digital imaging and software enhancement and manipulation. These skills were developed during the course of the project and remain as a personal resource for future use.

For this community then the project has connected artists across the country and the world. It has facilitated the development, honing and advancement of contemporary digital skills for all associated with those phases. In other ways the project has focussed a community in collaborating to apply the paint to the massive wall to complete an objective that could not be achieved by one person alone.

Ultimately the project is about distilling the essence of Myall Park Botanic Garden and communicating it as a story. All who stand before this mural and spend a moment in reflection and personal introspection inspired by this artwork will connect, I am sure, with the profound natural beauty that surrounds us in this special garden.

I have great pleasure in being able to declare the mural open for viewing! (Two young girls present pull the ribbon)