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#144  
DEC 2021

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# TEXTILE

FIBRE FORUM

ARTIST PROFILES \* FEATURES \* REVIEWS \*

EXHIBITIONS



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DRAWN THREAD







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(Detail of ATAA 2020 winning entry: "A fragment, a moment no. 3" by Paula Martin)

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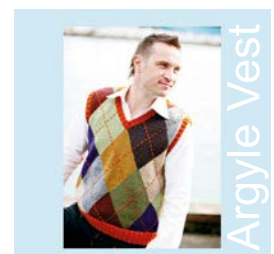
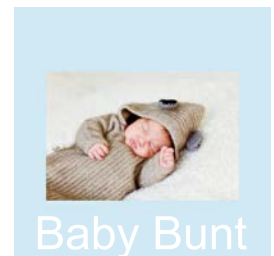
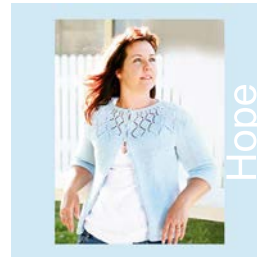
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# Letter from the Editor

Moira Simpson

*As I write this in late July 2021, three states are in lockdown once again.*

We continue to see all too often the impact that the pandemic – and lockdowns in particular – are having on the arts, with live concerts and theatre performances, in-person exhibitions, festivals and many other events cancelled or restricted to much smaller than normal audiences.

It is a very worrying time, but as artists we have talents that potentially provide distraction, an outlet for expressing and sharing our thoughts and concerns, a way to turn the restricted lifestyle of lockdown into creative time.

In this issue, you can read about how staff of artisan in Queensland reacted during the first weeks of the national lockdown in March and April 2020, initiating several methods of engaging with audiences and artists remotely using virtual exhibitions and social media. One of the projects was *AboutFace*, an exhibition (first virtual and then in smaller physical form in the gallery windows). The subject was masks and the transformation of the concept of the functional medical face mask into a form of art that is simultaneously protective and expressive. A callout attracted submissions of 104 masks from all over the world. You can see a selection in this issue or the full online exhibition by following the links in the article and admire the diverse creative responses of these artists to the challenge.

However, while some artists are driven to create and many have used the pandemic to stimulate new work, it is not the same experience for all artists; for some, the worries and concerns are a heavy mental burden that saps creative thinking and our responses may be very different.

Molli Sparkles has explored this in previous columns over the past eighteen months, highlighting the unwanted pressure that some people may feel when calls are being made (as they were frequently during the first lockdowns) to use the time creatively. In this issue, Molli touches on the subject again, exploring the mixed emotions and different motivations that may be experienced during the lockdowns.

Svenja continues her fascinating narrative of her artistic journey and, in four exhibition reviews, you can also see and read about the styles, ideas and approaches of many other artists. Inga Walton discusses her personal selection of fibreworks that were on display in the National Gallery of Victoria's *Triennial*. Pauline Grace shares the work of members of the Macarthur Textile Network. In their exhibition *Looking Back, Looking Forward*, the artists explored very personal responses to the concepts of time. Leah Emery presents the work of artists whose work was on show at artisan gallery in 2020 in *Drawn Thread*; a polysemic title that aptly alludes to the variety of materials, techniques and imagery evident in the artworks. Jonathan McBurnie, director of the Perc Tucker Regional Gallery in Townsville, has written an engaging article about the very personal and revealing embroideries of Regi Cherini in an exhibition entitled *All the Single Ladies*.

Profiled in this issue are three very different textile artists: Pru La Motte, Olga Cironis and Anne Jackson. Pru La Motte (1928-2020) was a talented Adelaide artist who worked in painting, textiles and ceramics, although she was renowned as a weaver in the 1970s, when she was known by her married name of Pru Medlin. The exhibition, curated by her daughter Margie Medlin, revealed an enchanting selection of

works by this multi-talented artist, presented in the tiny, colourful cottage in which La Motte lived and worked for the last twenty years of her life (she called it the endearing name of the Wombattery).

Another tapestry weaver featured in this issue is Anne Jackson, from the UK whose work is very different. She has devoted several years to researching, exploring and responding to the ideas, events, symbolism and imagery associated with witches throughout history. The subject matter is fascinating, as is Jackson's work in her witchcraft series: the *Certain Wytches* project.

Nyanda Smith provides an overview of the textiles, sculpture and installations of Olga Cironis, a Czech/Greek Australian artist from Western Australia. Cironis draws upon the life experience of herself and her family to explore concepts and attitudes around migration and belonging, cultural globalisation, and appropriated histories and uses diverse materials, from recycled clothing and furniture to human hair. Migration is also the central theme of the *Longing for Home*, a community project which Sophie Dieu, a 'new Australian' from France, initiated as a means to engage first generation Australian women through their creative work and social connection. The project resulted in a collaborative wearable artwork incorporating personal narratives and using slow stitching.

I hope you enjoy reading the diverse offerings of this issue and that they bring you inspiration and relief from the broader concerns of life as we had towards Christmas 2021, after another year of uncertainty, social restrictions, and constant change.

Best wishes,  
**Moira Simpson, Editor**





# PRU LA MOTTE

*There is a flurry of intense artistic activity in Adelaide each February and March when the Festival of Arts and the Fringe Festival take place providing numerous opportunities for artists and audiences. As the 2021 fringe approached, I read about A Way of Being, a retrospective exhibition of artworks by Pru La Motte (1928-2020). It was organised by her daughter, Margie Medlin, following La Motte's death in 2020 at the age of ninety-one. It was not part of the fringe program and would have been easy to miss amongst the many exhibitions, theatrical events, and concerts that were being presented during the festival period, but a promotional email from Guildhouse popped into my inbox, and I was intrigued by what I read.*

► Pru La Motte at her loom. Photograph: Dereck Duckhouse.

**L**a Motte was an artist who had lived in Adelaide most of her life and whose creative output included textiles, ceramics, painting, and later, photography, academic pursuits film-studies, sociology, politics and then poetry and writing fiction. However, she was particularly recognised for her woven artwork in the 1970s and had works exhibited by the Jam Factory in Adelaide, Bonython Gallery in Sydney, Desborough Gallery in Perth, the Crafts Council of Australia and the Art Gallery of New South Wales, and has work in major collections including the Art Gallery of South Australia, the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (The Powerhouse) in Sydney, and the National Gallery of Australia.

La Motte studied at the South Australian School of Art from 1944 to 1947 and initially embarked upon her artistic career as an illustrator. She married Brian Medlin in 1953 and they moved to the UK where she studied for two years at the Oxford College of Technology, with

Jessica Archer whom she described as 'a marvellous old Scottish weaving teacher from the Outer Hebrides'. Following the Medlins' return to Australia in 1964, she studied ceramics with the prominent ceramicist Milton Moon, at Brisbane Central Technical College, making large hand-coiled pots. In 1968, while Brian Medlin was on sabbatical at Swarthmore University and the family were in Philadelphia, she studied weaving for four months with American weaver Louise Todd, an experience that La Motte described as 'bloody marvellous'. She learned a variety of traditional methods, such as backstrap weaving and Navaho Indian weaving, and other new and innovative techniques that contributed to her later use of methods such as knotting, slashing, and layering to create free-form and sculptural wall hangings. As well as adopting innovative technical processes, La Motte also experimented with a variety of materials in her weaving, preferring the coarser Lincoln wool to merino, which she







found too soft for her style of work, and incorporating other fibres, such as dog, camel, cotton and flax.

After returning to Adelaide in 1967, La Motte became actively involved in the arts community and in sharing her skills and knowledge. She was a founding member of the Craft Association of South Australia (now Guildhouse) and taught workshops with CASA, and later became a member of the Crafts Board of the Australia Council from 1977-81. When the Jam Factory Workshop Inc., was established in 1973, she was one of a group of international master craftsmen employed there, becoming director of the Textile Design Workshop. She continued to participate and teach in various workshops and community events around the country, including the Fibre Works Collective symposium in 1979-80,

The exhibition was presented in the single-storey terrace cottage in which La Motte lived for the last twenty years of her life, tucked away in a quiet cul-de-sac in the

---

**SHE WAS ONE OF THE NEW KIND OF WEAVERS WHO DESIGNED THEIR OWN WORK AS OPPOSED TO THE TRADITIONAL APPROACH OF WEAVERS TRANSLATING INTO TAPESTRY DESIGNS THAT WERE PRODUCED BY PAINTERS.**

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◀ Installation shot showing paintings by Pru La Motte displayed in *A Way of Being*, 2021. Photo by Moira Simpson.

◀ Pru La Motte, woven skirts and tops, 1970s, cotton and wool. Photo by Moira Simpson. Detail of woven skirt by Pru La Motte.

historic south-west corner of Adelaide's CBD. Her cottage was her home and studio and a gallery for her works as well as those of other artists whose prints and paintings she collected. She called it 'the Wombattery' and the cosy interior spaces and strongly-coloured walls did indeed create a feeling of entering an underground burrow. The small rooms were painted in bold colours reminiscent of Frida Kahlo's home, the interior décor often echoing colours in the artworks.

The front door opened straight into a small living room with walls boldly painted in red and fuchsia. On the walls were large oil paintings by La Motte, a medium that she started using in her eighties. They featured surreal, dream-like compositions of figures with references to Greek mythology, religious iconography and paintings by Botticelli. In addition to her own paintings, here and along both walls of the narrow corridor leading to the back of the cottage, were drawings, paintings and prints by other prominent artists including Barbara Hanrahan, Arthur Boyd, Tom Cleghorn, Jo Caddy, Bill Salmon, Brian Seidel and Ann Newmarch.

In the library, an audio-visual presentation compiled by Margie Medlin – an experimental filmmaker and media artist – presented archival images of La Motte and her work during the period from 1969 to 1980 (when she used her married name, Medlin). These were accompanied by music by Virginia Barratt and readings by Eileen Darley of excerpts from La Motte's letters and interviews, and quotes from reviews of exhibitions in which La Motte's work was displayed.

In the former dining room at the back of the cottage, were examples of La Motte's textiles – woven wall hangings and garments, and small embroidered panels – as well as publications which had featured her work, including *Vogue* and *Women's Day* magazines, and the books *Twelve Australian Craftsmen* and *The Artist Craftsman in Australia*. Small appliqué and machine stitched works portrayed a whimsical use of imagery, much of it based on the human body, stitched in the style of pen and ink drawings.

La Motte's love of colour was especially evident in her woven textiles, which were predominantly reds and oranges, mossy green, and earthy browns. She dyed her yarns using natural materials such as cochineal, henna, soursob and onion skins and later also used synthetic dyes. A framed print of a design for an un-made wall-hanging depicted a row of stylised figures reminiscent of mid-century modern graphics and fabric design. The imagery and colours – terracotta, rust and brown – were reflective of La Motte's interest in African textiles which she encountered during travels in Ghana, West Africa, in the 1950s. Similar colours and stylised imagery were apparent in two woven skirts and some small woven panels hanging nearby, but the room was dominated by a large wall-hanging woven from rust and mossy green yarns. Layers, holes and protrusions created depth and



▲ Pru La Motte, tabard, date unknown, machine stitched appliqué decoration. Photo by Margie Medlin

**LA MOTTE ALSO EXPERIMENTED WITH A VARIETY OF MATERIALS IN HER WEAVING, PREFERRING THE COARSER LINCOLN WOOL TO MERINO, WHICH SHE FOUND TOO SOFT FOR HER STYLE OF WORK, AND INCORPORATING OTHER FIBRES, SUCH AS DOG, CAMEL, COTTON AND FLAX.**

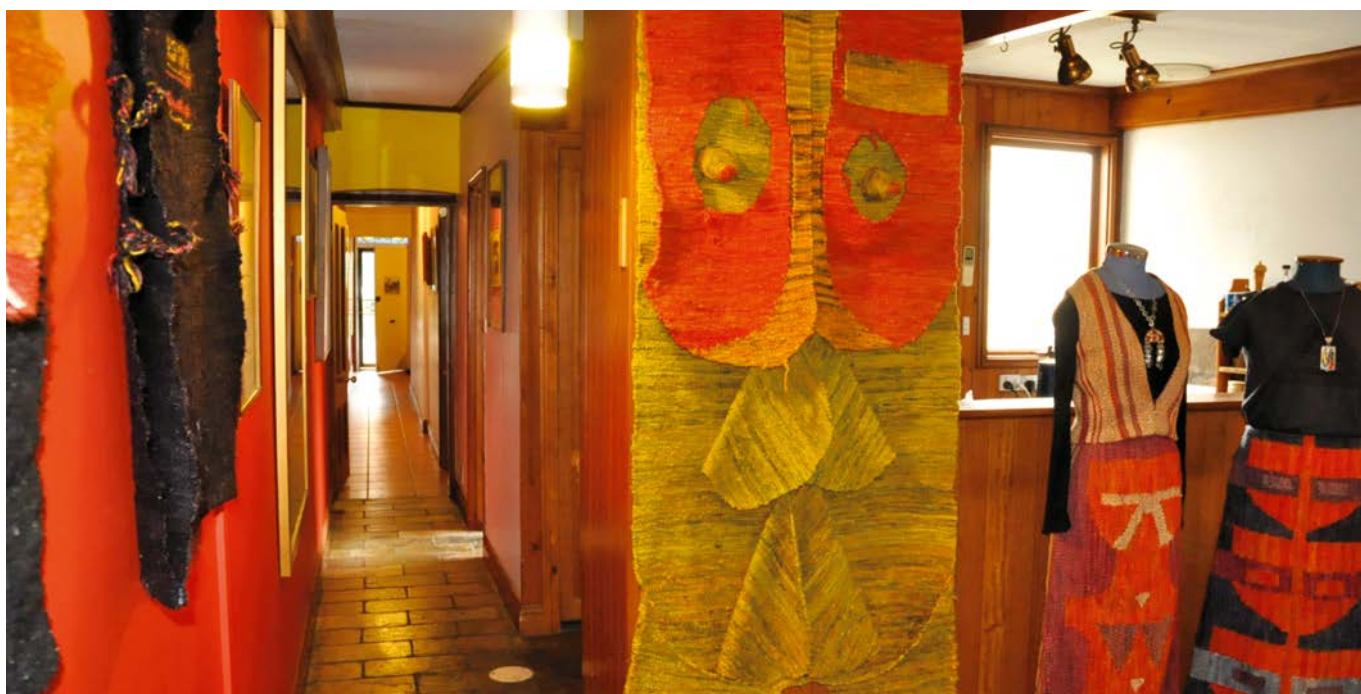
forms suggestive of the female body. The stylised design, large scale and sculptural elements were reminiscent of the woven wall-hangings that became synonymous with the Fibre Art Movement of the 1970s, and reflect the influence of fibre artists whose work she admired, such as the Polish fibre artist, Magdalena Abakanowicz, the American weaver, Louise Todd, and Dominic di Mare, an American mixed-media sculptor and fibre artist.

From this room, large windows and the back door opened onto a shady courtyard in which were several ceramic pots made by La Motte, as well as a ceramic stool by Milton Moon and a pot by Marea Gazzard. The corporeal imagery in many of La Motte's textiles and paintings was also apparent in her ceramics; large, rounded forms like the swollen belly of a pregnant woman, were hand-built,



▲ Pru La Motte, untitled, date unknown, 55 x 130 cm, limited edition digital poster, scanned from original watercolour design for un-made wall-hanging.

THE EXHIBITION REVEALED AN ENCHANTING SELECTION OF PAINTINGS, CERAMICS AND TEXTILES BY A MULTI-TALENTED AND INFLUENTIAL ADELAIDE ARTIST, A WOMAN WHO WAS A FEMINIST, AN EXPERIMENTAL WEAVER, A PASSIONATE ADVOCATE FOR CRAFTWORK TO BE RECOGNISED FOR ITS ARTISTIC QUALITIES, AND AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN ARTS COMMUNITY.



► Detail of *Alice* by Pru La Motte. Photo by Moira Simpson.





some simply finished as unglazed stoneware, others decorated with figurative designs painted using glazes and oxides.

The exhibition revealed an enchanting selection of paintings, ceramics and textiles by a multi-talented and influential Adelaide artist, a woman who was a feminist, an experimental weaver, a passionate advocate for craftwork to be recognised for its artistic qualities, and an active member of the South Australian arts community. In curating *A Way of Being*, Margie Medlin was limited by space and the availability of her mother's artworks, displaying those that remained in the possession of the artist at the time of her death, plus a few others that Medlin was able to borrow from family members and friends. Other examples of La Motte's artwork are held in the permanent collections of major galleries including the Art Gallery of South Australia and the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences in Sydney. Nevertheless, the exhibition and audio-visual presentation provided fascinating insights into the work of a multi-talented artist whose work in weaving, in particular, was experimental and innovative, positioning her as a leading Australian artist of the period.

The readings of La Motte's words conveyed an impression of a strong-minded woman with a passion for arts and community involvement. She was one of the new kind of weavers who designed their own work as opposed to the traditional approach of weavers translating into tapestry designs that were produced by painters. The common attitudes to weaving as opposed to 'visual arts' such as painting and sculpture frustrated and angered her. She rebelled against the compartmentalising of

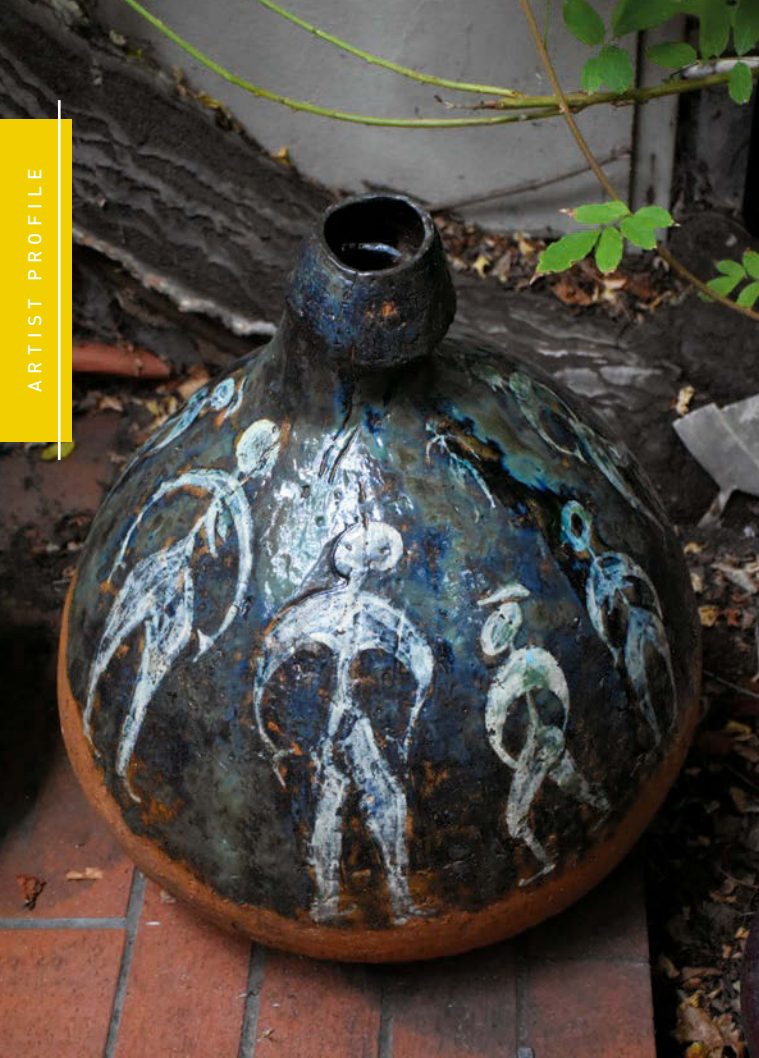
crafts and visual arts and the assumptions that painting and sculpture were inherently more concerned with communication than was weaving. 'I don't see why a tapestry shouldn't communicate as much as a piece of sculpture or a painting. It irritates me as much when a tapestry is treated purely as a piece of interior decoration, as when a painting is.'

Around 1979-80, referring to plans for a symposium to be organised by the South Australian Fibreworks Collective, she talked of her belief that the symposium would benefit people who fell under either the crafts or the visual arts umbrella 'by breaking down barriers which had been built up through the years for the convenience of the bureaucrats'. She described craftworkers as 'sculptors who work with fibres or soft materials'. When talking of materials such as fibre, soft materials and leather being used to create artworks, she posed the question: 'are we not talking about pliable sculpture rather than static sculpture, such as steel sculpture?'

While La Motte was an active board member and fulfilled other organisational roles in the arts, she sometimes found the experiences frustrating. Her attitudes towards bureaucracy were expressed in some of her more satirical artworks, such as her woven wall-hangings entitled *The Bed Meeting*, *The Pigeon Factory* and *Member of the Board*. These were not shown in *A Way of Being*, as they are in the collections of the Art Gallery of South Australia and the Museums of Arts and Applied Sciences, but can be seen online. She produced satirical pieces such as these through her 'desire to undermine through oppositions'.

In *The Bed Meeting*, La Motte drew upon religious





▲ Pru La Motte, pot c. 1969, glazed stoneware. Photo by Moira Simpson.

▼ Pru La Motte, pot c. 1969, stoneware with oxide painted design. Photo: Moira G Simpson.



imagery to satirise the workings of the recently established Crafts Board of the Australia Council, showing jeweller Darani Lewers and seven board members with haloed heads 'all cosy and chatty like people in bed' and the director hovering above as 'archangel Michael Griggs' blowing words out of his trumpet. In *The Pigeon Factory*, she depicts the master craftsmen at the Jam Factory Crafts Workshops (herself included) who are shown in various states of nakedness, the numbers of items of clothing representing the level of each individual's 'guilt or innocence, political activity'. The figures are: Frank Bauer (jewellery); the potter (shown as faceless as the position had not been filled); Pru (weaving) and Sam Herman (glass), who are both fully clothed; Vagn Hemmingsen (jewellery); and Pietro Salemme (leather), who is shown with no clothes. The manager, Mike Wallis-Smith, is shown above, depicted as a pigeon carrying a briefcase. In an excerpt from the archival audio-visual, La Motte says of this imagery: 'It was a bit hard on us really, because we were an energetic, committed bunch of people — but sometimes I thought there were more positive things we could be doing, like making things or being involved at the grassroots level. I reckon when I was on it, the Board was more radical and innovative than most of those it served.' Her tapestry *Member of the Board* shows 'a case of bureaucracy taking away creative time. A potter gets a grant and the weaver has a large empty spool behind her ear. (<https://collection.maas.museum/object/57460>).

Seeing La Motte's work presented in the setting of her home and studio provided a richness to the experience, showing how her love of art and colour was infused throughout her life, home and work. The exhibition left me with a sense of a woman with a strong personality and a quirky sense of humour who created a home and workspace in which she could surround herself with colour and art, and immerse herself in her creative activities. She died in 2020 but her presence remained strong within the walls of the cottage and the display of her artworks.

I hope that it may be possible to see more of the work of this talented artist in one of our major public art galleries to ensure that her work and her place in Australian art history are more widely recognised by audiences today. With this in mind, Margie Medlin has been compiling a substantial archive of her mother's correspondence and journals for a bequest to the Art Gallery of South Australia (AGSA) Research Library; and perhaps in time the AGSA will present a retrospective with a wider selection of La Motte artworks. In the meantime, for those wishing to learn more about Pru La Motte's life and work, you can listen to a broadcast about the artist and the exhibition: *Pru La Motte retrospective*, Blueprint with Jonathan Green, Radio National, broadcast on 27 Feb 2021:

<https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/blueprintforliving/prue-la-motte-retrospective/13191320>.

**Moira G. Simpson**

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HER ATTITUDES TOWARDS BUREAUCRACY WERE EXPRESSED IN SOME OF HER MORE SATIRICAL ARTWORKS, SUCH AS HER WOVEN WALL-HANGINGS ENTITLED *THE BED MEETING*, *THE PIGEON FACTORY* AND *MEMBER OF THE BOARD*.

Pru La Motte, *The Pigeon Factory*, 1977, wool, woven tapestry. Collection of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences. Collection: Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences. Gift of the Jam Factory Craft and Design Centre. Photographer Kate Chidlow. Object No. 92/1766. The figures shown are: above: Mike Wallis-Smith (manager); left to right: Frank Bauer (jeweller renting space); the faceless potter who never came; Pru La Motte (weaver); Sam Herman (glass); Vagn Hemmingsen (jeweller); Pietro Salemme (leather).

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# Drawn Thread: *celebrating FIFTY years of FEMINISM and FIBRE at artisan*

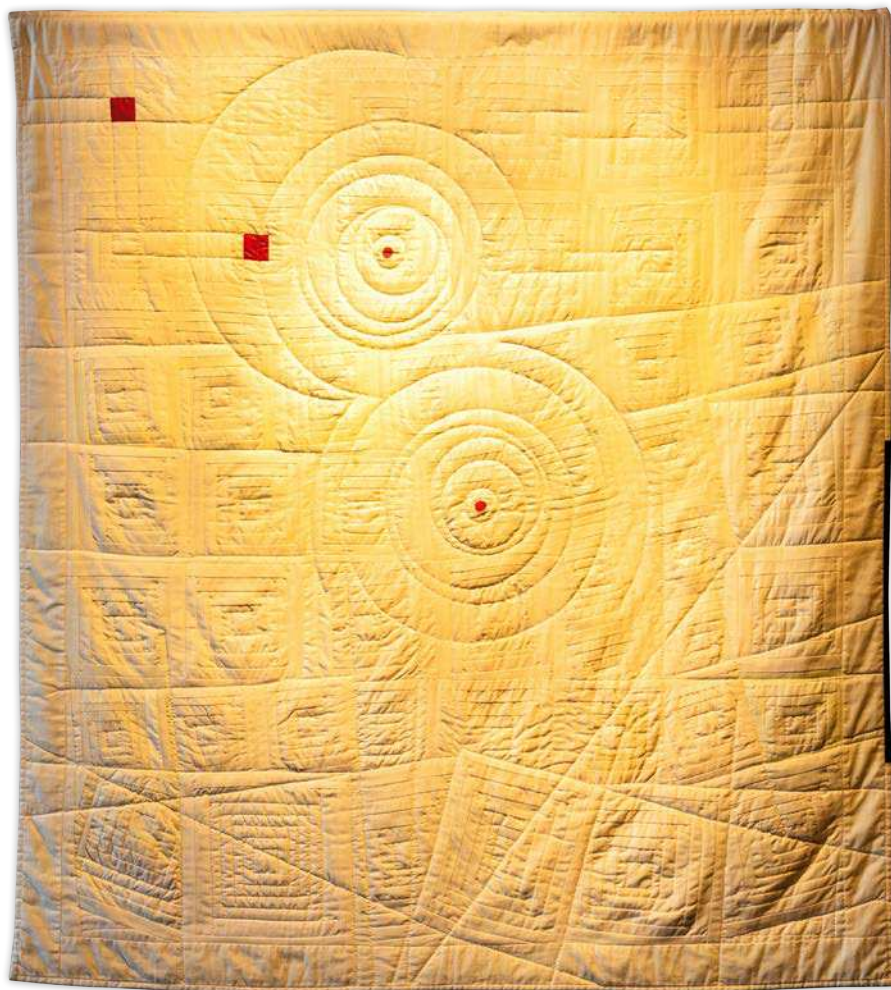


Michelle Vine, *Affirmation Tub*, 2018 – 2019, 103 x 110 x 145 cm, cast iron bath tub, faux fur, foam, with audio track on headphones. Photo by artist.

*Over the course of the last half-century, Brisbane art gallery artisan has championed an ongoing conversation around feminism, fibre, and emancipation and draws attention to the necessity to keep this dialogue alive in Drawn Thread. Female-identifying Queensland practitioners who have exhibited with artisan throughout its history are interspersed with national artists whose practices champion, advocate and challenge a broad audience's relationship to feminist fibre art. Drawn Thread is a celebration of and call to arms for the continuation of a feminist textile platform to highlight the struggle of women in the hierarchy of the art and craft world.*

(Excerpt from *Draw(ing) Thread*, an essay by Louise R Mayhew, <https://artisan.org.au/blogs/prior-exhibitions/the-hand-made-tale>).





Ruth Stoneley, *Shot to Pieces*, 1986, 158 x 145 cm, cotton and paint, polyester batting, hand-quilted patchwork, log cabin technique. Photography by Louis Lim.

We all have a relationship with textiles – we wear them, we sleep enshrouded in them and thus have the capacity to be engaged in their messaging. The contextual textile realm has the curious ability of being able to deliver messages softly, luring their unsuspecting prey in to delight in the laborious tactility of the work prior to the message being fully digested. Perhaps more so than other mediums, textile-based work has a long and varied lineage of cultural implications that are unpacked with every stitch of every textile artist from before our collective memory even began. The memory of textile creation as a nearly exclusively feminine pursuit still sings loud in our historical reckoning. It has offered women a welcoming cultural engagement throughout periods where other means were denied, forbidden or prohibitive. As such, contemporary textiles offer a powerful tool for delivering conversations pertaining to female experience, feminist messaging or connecting with the legacy of domestic craft pioneers.

Feminism is a many faceted, highly nuanced creature that evolves and recalibrates, pending cultural climate. However, at its core, it is a simple desire for equitable treatment of all genders. When artisan, known at its inception as the Craft Association, was established in 1970, the First Wave of feminism had already paved the way for ongoing conversations, having tackled suffrage, education, and financial independence. The 1970s saw Australia deep in the throes of Second Wave Feminism: labour division, reproductive rights, and establishing facilities for victims of domestic violence among other big picture issues were at the fore.

The arts serve as a targeted expression of cultural deliberation and, in the case of textile arts, a historical channel for decorative subversion. In contemporary times 'craftivism', a craft-based movement disseminating hand-crafted items which express messages of political discontent, has gained traction as a grass-roots device for much of



Sera Waters, *Dribbling Blood*, 2010, variable dimensions, Felt, sequins, beads, cotton. Photography by Louis Lim.



► Foreground on plinth: *Kate Just, Shed That Skin*, 2008, 350 x 80 x 5 cm, metallic thread, photography by Louis Lim. Left: Ruth Stoneley, *Shot to Pieces*, 1986, 158 x 145 cm, cotton and paint, polyester batting, hand-quilted patchwork, log cabin technique. Back wall: Janet Brereton, *Modern Woman*, 2001, 230H x 202W x 4.5D cm, hand-dyed cotton rope, Collection: Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences. Gift of Kurt Brereton, photographer Ryan Hernandez. Photography by Louis Lim.

## THE ARTS SERVE AS A TARGETED EXPRESSION OF CULTURAL DELIBERATION AND, IN THE CASE OF TEXTILE ARTS, A HISTORICAL CHANNEL FOR DECORATIVE SUBVERSION.

the making community from Etsy sellers to institutionally sanctioned fine artists.

*Drawn Thread* captures a unique spectrum of feminist concerns that spans half a century of Australian craft. In a sea of colour schemes from the vibrant to the ethereal, to shimmering disco sequins and down a dark hole to the gloomy and eerily monochromatic sits the affecting quilts of Brisbane textile royalty, the late Ruth Stoneley. In her work *Shot to Pieces*, a beautiful example of her monochromatic exploration, she employs a patchwork technique known as 'log cabin' to imbue the otherwise white fabric with stark red interruptions indicative of bullet wounds. Through this manipulation of textiles within her craft, she expresses a metaphoric narrative of personal experiences of womanhood, motherhood and powerfully communicates tension and agitation. Her juxtaposition of decorative and narrative elements constitutes a seductive delivery of her lived experience.

Another seductive delivery, albeit a jarring one, can be found in Sera Waters' *Dribbling Blood*. Her use of a multitude of bright red sequins and beading to craft shimmering interruptions of what cannot be mistaken for anything but blood of fresh application, is embedded in a putty layer at eye height into the corner of the entry wall. The work's shiny construction forces the viewer to engage with a scene akin to the



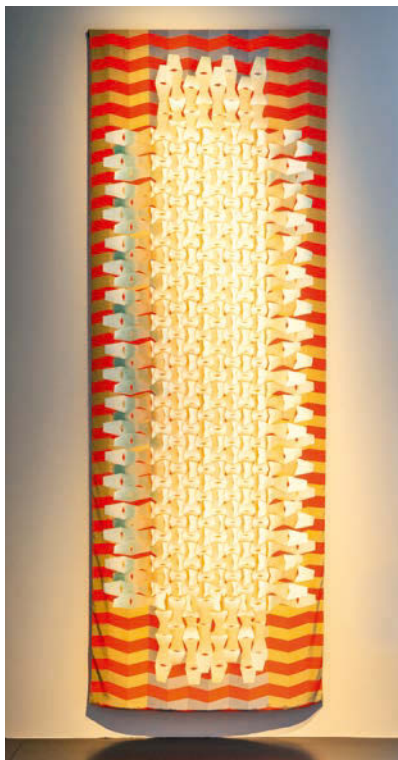
secondhand witnessing of a scene of brutality, the aftermath of domestic violence that could have taken place in any domestic realm and remains emblazoned on one's retina for enduring contemplation.

The shape of Wiradjuri artist Karla Dickens' *Warrior Woman XII* mixed media metal undies is almost entirely obfuscated by a cacophony of bright strings of plastic rosary beads, topped with a baby Jesus and

replete with a series of tiny dangling skulls. The threads holding the external chaos in place are tenuous, yet the interior is composed of metal and alludes to the toughness of the wearer. The work is accompanied by a poem by Dickens which references the plainly rendered 'no-frills' undies as 'hardened undergarments, big girls' undies, protective covers, personal security guards.' Indigenous women have needed



▲ Sue-Ching Lascelles, *New Skin, Old Moon*, 2020, variable dimensions, plastic, recycled PET, thread, tulle. Photography by Louis Lim.



▲ Jill Kinnear, *Reinforcement*, 2020, 287 x 114.5 cm, double sided stole, digitally printed onto silk charmeuse. Photography by Louis Lim.



▲ Mona Ryder, *The Illustrated Land*, variable dimensions, 1990 – 2020, mixed media. Photography by Louis Lim.

to seek protective mechanisms to deal with systemic abuse dealt to them at the hands of institutions since their lands were invaded. The dry humour embedded within an emblem of female privacy, rendered here dripping in kitsch religious iconography, leads us to believe that the artist holds a glimmer of optimism for the day when the undies can be metaphorically cast aside and (as her poem concludes), 'warrior women play again, butts blowing in the breeze, gracefully relaxed, in empowered freedom.'

Also heralding the way for an era of empowered freedom is Kate Just's *Shed that Skin*. Knitted entirely from sumptuous metallic thread, the otherworldly empty form that stretches out to four metres long has a very feminine torso which peters down to a narrow serpentine tail that wraps around its table-like plinth many times, like a boa constrictor mid-meal. Women in biblical narratives are often represented as cunning and manipulating, and are imbued with the representation of evil serpent mythology. Here Just is shedding this superfluous depiction of women and, in its place,

we are presented with a raw and intimate reinterpretation of historical representations of femininity.

A very literal textile interpretation of the serpentine form feeds Sue-Ching Lascelles' *New Skin, Old Moon*, an epic exploration of motherhood and identity across cultures. On the wall right beside Just's metallic heroine, hang over thirty snakes crafted from Chinese laundry bags that appear to be mid-slither, emerging from a shopping bag held by two puppet-like, hand-crafted arms extending from the wall. The snakes rise to the very top of the gallery wall, aiming for, but just missing, a soft tulle crafted ladder held by another pair of arms, a seeming exercise in futility. *New Skin, Old Moon* explores themes of identity, cultural confusion and superstition, all influential factors in how the artist was raised by her Chinese Malaysian mother and, in turn, how she raises her own child. These themes continue to inform how Lascelles views her place in the world, as an outsider between two cultures, and as a mother struggling to determine the relevance of her own mother's lessons.

Jill Kinnear was a lecturer of

Sue-Ching Lascelles, who is said to have piqued her interest in textiles. The intricate patterning on Kinnear's work, *Reinforcement*, a double-sided, digitally printed charmeuse stole, was inspired by a woven metal grille, historically used in some cultures for gender segregation. While the architectural substance of these metal separators has been handsomely engineered, they remain a solemn reminder of gender disparity and its enduring legacy.

Beata Batorowicz's *Daddy's WWII Braces*, a gigantic set of knitted shirt braces, are large enough to wrap a car. These larger-than-life suspenders mimic the larger-than-life legacy of German artist Joseph Beuys, a seminal twentieth century art figure who Batorowicz has adopted in this work as her mythical father. Through this playful adventure, slipping herself into folklore, Batorowicz is able to comment on WWII history and the Western art canon through the lens of her Polish heritage.

Mona Ryder has painfully revisited environmental issues, gender politics and memory in *The Illustrated Land*. Flying over America



in the 1990s, Ryder was shocked by the polluted landscape below. Little did she know what devastating environmental destruction was to ensue, and this work is a further warning, three decades hence, to reconsider our relationship to the landscape. The original installation featured leather hides configured into a female torso depicting the natural environment, and a male torso covered in bombs, volcanoes, snakes and crawling insects, highlighting the artist's distress at the ravages of the landscape. The male torso, *The Tattooed Man*, has been reconfigured into the 2020 installation, *The Illustrated Land*, and stands with a foreboding defiance and textural features, conjuring an explosive apocalyptic narrative. The figure is situated in a luscious framing of purple velvet, fur, and hand-crafted canvas fruits. The artist references the beauty and fragility of our relationships with each other, our environment, and the tenuous nature of both.

A similarly luscious crowd pleaser, Michelle Vine's *Affirmation*

*Tub*, a claw-footed bathtub covered in a thick white synthetic fur coat reminiscent of many a grandparents' shagpile carpets, stands like an oversized puppy in the middle of the main gallery. Viewers were invited to sit in the bathtub and listen to an audio track of whispered affirmations, delivering an intimate and sensory escape from the otherwise public surrounds. Vine, impacted by the loss of touch after a divorce and adult children moving from the family home, humorously constructed a fabricated sensory experience by considering how her household items, many of which embody gendered domestic labour, could offer surrogate sensory comfort.

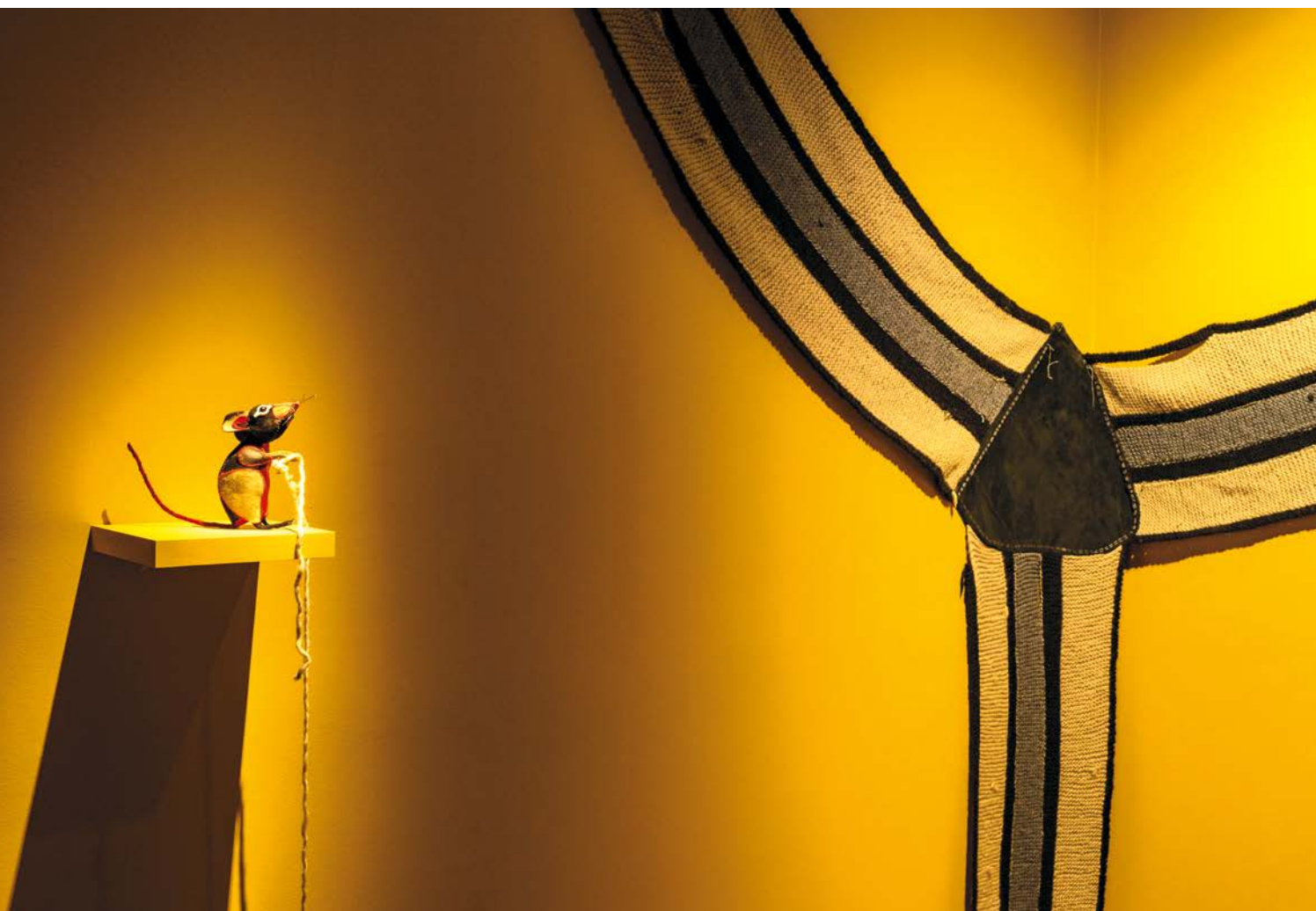
Robert Brain renders a reworking of Caravaggio's *Judith Beheading Holofernes* in gros point wool tapestry in a bright, primary school-esque palette. His rendition, *Judith & Holofernes, With Thanks to Mr Caravaggio*, pays homage to a much-celebrated embodiment of female rage: Jewish widow, Judith, who seduces and beheads warmongering general Holofernes in his camp in

order to save the Israelites from being besieged. Brain's tapestry canon is full of humour, intrigue and gender politics and this work embodies and celebrates his love of anthropology and textiles in an infectious and engaging packaging.

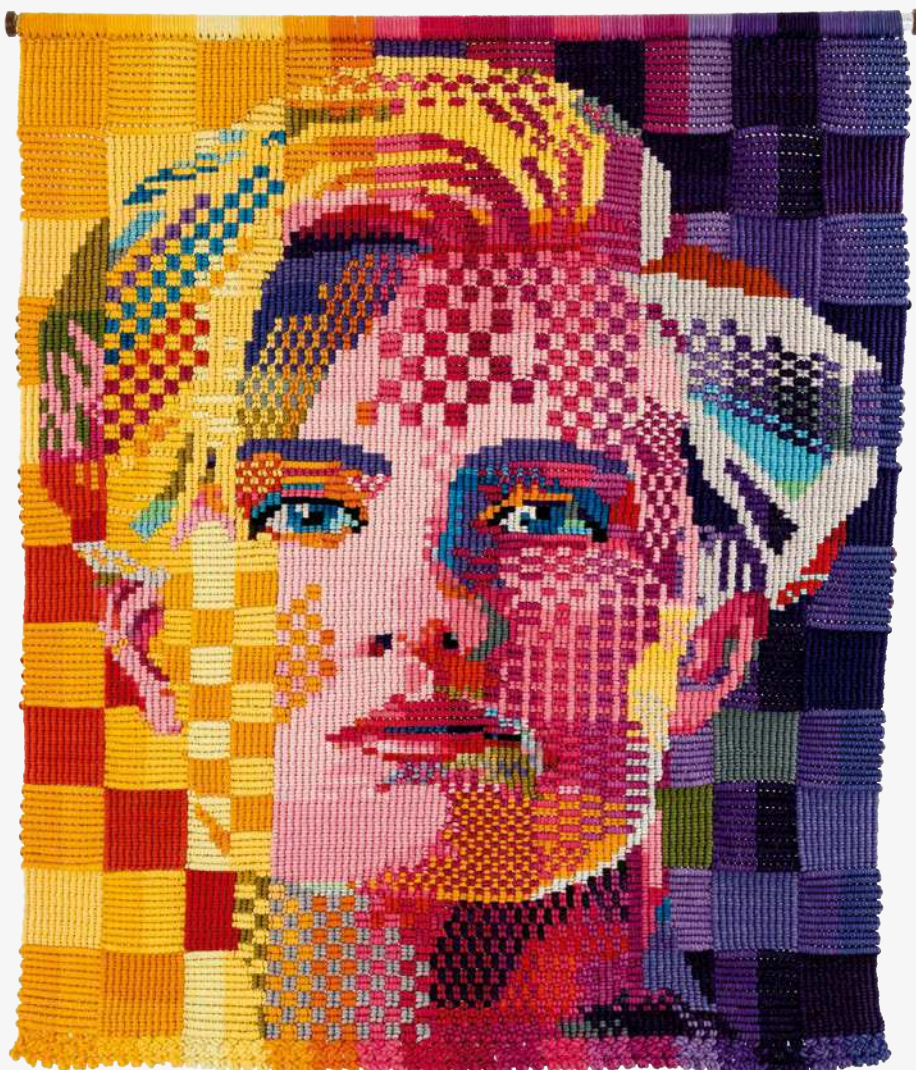
Punctuating the heart of the exhibition lies the late Janet Brereton's *Modern Woman*, her last completed work from 1991, a homage to the medical staff who nursed her through her final years of kidney dialysis. The scale and scope of *Modern Woman* are impressive to behold and the colours, created from the hand-dyed lengths of cotton rope knotting, are vibrant and utterly captivating. In the pre-internet world, Brereton composed her patterning through intricately hand-encoded graphs and the resulting execution is a triumph of tactile manual fabrication which would be hard to replicate today even in a world where computers are on hand to assist with much of the fabrication process.

While *Drawn Thread* by no means pioneers textiles as conduits for subversive and/or overt contextual

▼ Beata Batorowicz, *Daddy's WWII Braces*, 2002, variable dimensions, knitting yarn, suede, thread. *Chew*, 2020, fur, leather, cotton, 23 x 8 x 3 cm. Photography by Louis Lim.







IN THE PRE-INTERNET WORLD, BRERETON COMPOSED HER PATTERNING THROUGH INTRICATELY HAND-ENCODED GRAPHS AND THE RESULTING EXECUTION IS A TRIUMPH OF TACTILE MANUAL FABRICATION WHICH WOULD BE HARD TO REPLICATE TODAY EVEN IN A WORLD WHERE COMPUTERS ARE ON HAND TO ASSIST WITH MUCH OF THE FABRICATION PROCESS.

◀ Janet Brereton, *Modern Woman*, 2001, 230H x 202W x 4.5D cm, hand-dyed cotton rope, Collection: Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences. Gift of Kurt Brereton, photographer Ryan Hernandez.

dialogue, it does throw a spotlight onto the many ways in which exhibitors from artisan's rich fifty-year history have utilised textiles to speak to feminist issues plaguing the cultural landscape.

*Drawn Thread* was exhibited at artisan, 45 King St, Bowen Hills QLD, December 5 2020 – February 13 2021. Featured artists: Beata Batorowicz, Janet Brereton, Jill Kinnear, Karla Dickens, Kate Just, Michelle Vine, Mona Ryder, Robert Brain, Ruth Stoneley, Sera Waters and Sue Ching-Lascelles. Exhibition essay by Dr Louise Mayhew can be found at [artisan.org.au](http://artisan.org.au).

#### Leah Emery

Access and Engagement  
Coordinator, artisan



▲ Robert Brain, *Judith & Holofernes, With Thanks to Mr Caravaggio*, 2017, 80 x 112 cm, gros point wool tapestry, photography by Louis Lim.



# AUSTRALIAN TEXTILE ART AWARD ATAA 2020

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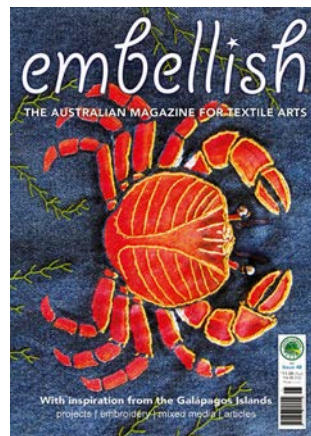
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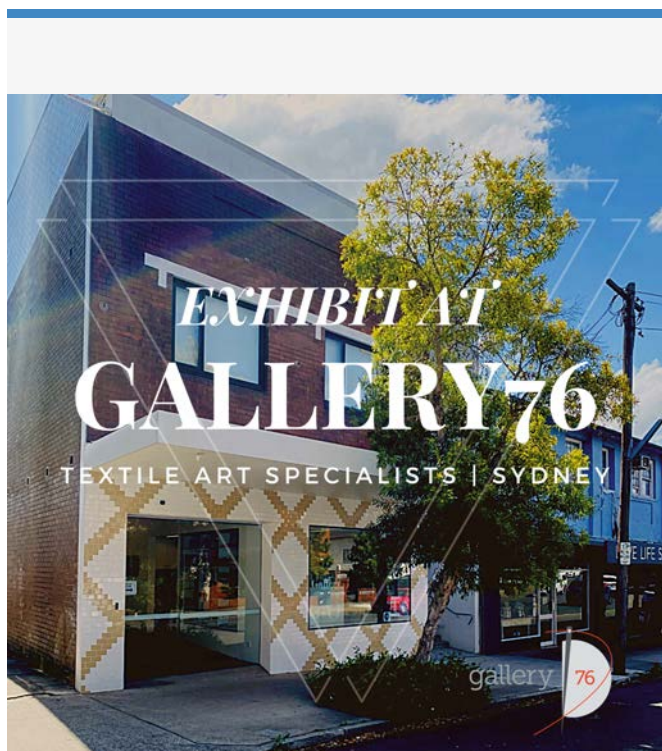


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REGULAR

# Situation Svenja KELP COLLARS



*On my return from my recent holiday in Tasmania I noticed that the deadline for the Toowoomba Regional Gallery biennial competition and exhibition Contemporary Wearables was looming.*

▲  
Svenja, *Kelp Collar*, 2021, copper shim, dyed satin, alcohol inks, soldering and free motion embroidery.



I felt sufficiently inspired to make a piece and try my luck again – my previous attempt, *Luciferin Lei* in 2019 was not accepted. I am no longer sure where the idea came from, but I was determined to sew and mould a kelp-inspired piece in copper shim. Perhaps it was my recent enrolment in Alysnn Midgelow Marsden's workshop and my purchase of one of her books, both of which include techniques for stitching on metal.

After looking at supplies through craft shops on-line, I found I could only access small panels of shim, but I wanted a bigger piece, so it was time to consult my resident engineer, (husband Matt) who found me a local supplier. 100 x 60mm was more like it and, at 0.1mm thickness, it was quite malleable. It was more difficult to cut than I had anticipated: I used serrated tin snips to cut the main shape from my cardboard template, but it left a slightly jagged edge. The holes were very difficult – I had hoped to be able to use a craft knife, but I had to make a punctured line with a nail to give the tin snips access – quite a difficult process. In an effort to soften all the edges, I went over the entire piece with a ball-peen hammer, which gave it a very nice texture and made it far more manageable.

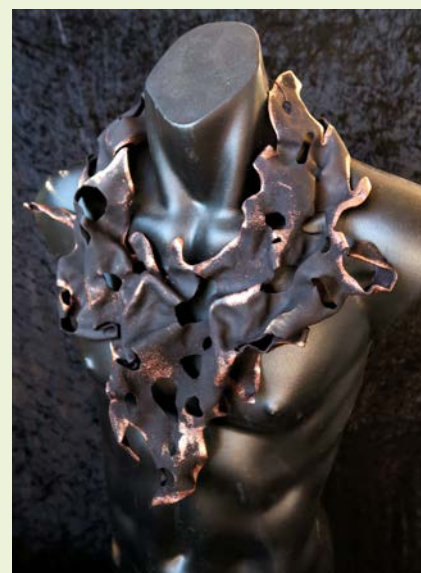
I hoped to further reduce the sharpness of the edges with free-motion embroidery. Heeding Alysnn's warning of protecting your needle plate from the burrs created by puncturing the metal with the needle, I laid the copper shim piece over a piece of dyed satin and stitched around all the edges, then again with a circular stitch to encapsulate the edge. I then covered the surface with topographical-type lines of stitching, mimicking patterns I had seen on kelp on King Island during my residency in December 2019; they were very intriguing and I am unsure whether they were made by dried salt or some other surface modification. I did break a few needles, but that was largely due to some rough stop-starts, with the metal being a little less forgiving than fabric. I used a soldering iron to remove the piece from the fabric, leaving a small frill of the fabric with a sealed edge. Wanting to add a bit of colour to the

copper, I discovered through research that alcohol inks would do the job, so green, yellow, and magenta were subtly combined. Although I had used a cardboard template to mould the initial concept, it was quite different using the shim itself, and a little daunting. I wanted to achieve soft and undulating folds to cover the chest and wrap around the neck, just like the pieces of kelp I had played with on King Island.

With some extra time on my hands, I thought I would try a second version, this time a far more realistic version. Using grey, soft, upholstery leather, I cut out a shape (already suggested by the off-cut I was using) and many holes to create the lacier look that some of the kelp has. I boiled it in black dye to colour and stiffen it. I never quite know how hard or curled up it is going to become; this time it remained quite malleable but stiff enough. It looked exactly like a piece of dried kelp. To link it to the copper shim piece, and to reference the rusted/on-fire colour scheme of much of the dried kelp I had seen, I used embossing powder to create a metallic edge; rather than the flatness of paint, the embossing powder makes it look more like it has been dipped in metal.

Unfortunately, in late June I was advised that neither piece had been accepted into the exhibition, but I was hardly surprised. It is very much a studio jeweller-oriented exhibition, although I do like to continue to challenge it by using textiles. I had thought my use of copper shim might have helped, but I guess not. The good news, however, is that because I created works based on my current kelp theme, they remain contenders as sculptural pieces for inclusion in my *Algalrhythms* exhibition. I've also now explored working with shim, which I have begun including in my digital print kelp embroidery series, along with other foils. Unfortunately, I had to withdraw from Alysnn Midgelow Marsden's workshop due to lockdown concerns, but at least I have her book to guide and inspire me. *Algalrhythms* continues to grow.

Text and photos by Svenja



▲ Svenja, *Kelp Curlicue*, 2021, boiled and dyed leather, embossing powder.

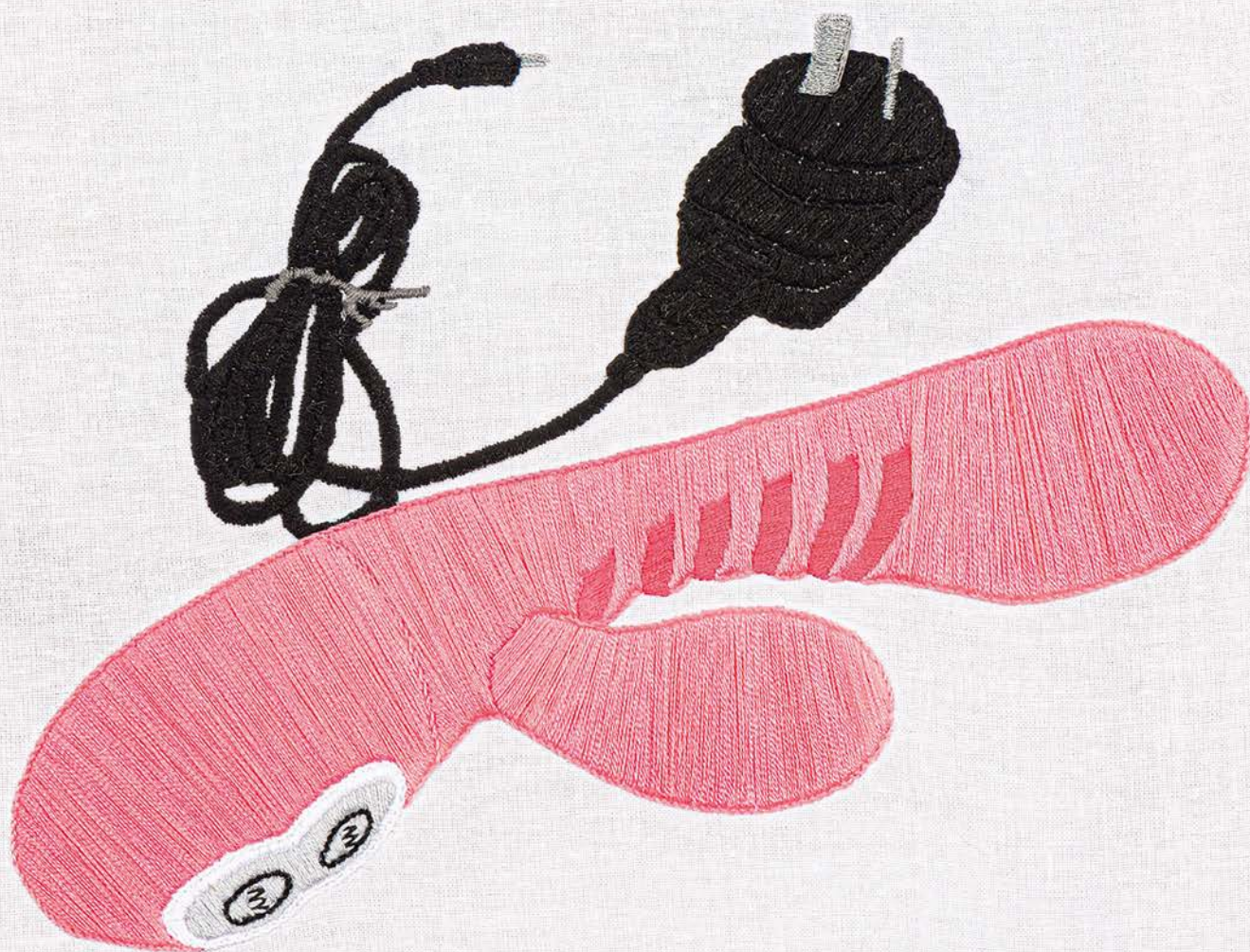


▲ Svenja, *Kelp Collar*, 2021, first stage, cut and beaten copper shim.



▲ Svenja, *Kelp Collar*, 2021, sewing shim on to dyed satin with free motion embroidery.





# *All the* SINGLE LADIES

*All the Single Ladies is the title of embroiderer Regi Cherini's first solo exhibition which was held at Perc Tucker Regional Gallery from November 27, 2020 to February 7, 2021. In this article, gallery director Jonathan McBurnie introduces the artist and her work.*

Regi Cherini, *Good Vibes Only*, *All the Single Ladies* series,  
2019, embroidery floss on calico, 27.5CM X 27.5 cm.  
Photo by Michael Marzik.





▲ Regi Cherini, *Sunday Dinner*, *All the Single Ladies* series, 2019, embroidery floss on calico, 32 X 32. Photo by Michael Marzik.

What can I tell you about Regi Cherini without giving too much away? First of all, Regi Cherini does not exist, not really. She is a persona, a cipher, and a pseudonym for a North Queensland-based artist. She is a beautiful, intelligent, six-foot tall, blonde, and yes, she is single.

Mentioning Cherini's physical beauty, of course, is a vulgar way of introducing any artist, and could be viewed as a politically incorrect irrelevance (especially written by a male); however, it is an important part of the reading of this work, illustrating

the world of the artist that created it. For we do live in a world that, no matter how often and how strenuously we deny it, is dreadfully shallow. Cherini's attractiveness, height, hair colour, even her singledom and intelligence, are all aspects that can be (and often are) debated, fetishised, judged, criticised, and objectified. Sadly, the acute double standards that women are subjected to seem to be on the upswing.

Cherini's work addresses this inequity with a deceptive visual simplicity. Rather than be stigmatised by her singledom, Cherini has aligned

the ordinariness of not having a partner, with ironic reference to the sisterhood and affirmation of Beyoncé's hit, *All the Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)*. A clarion call for women tired of their (presumably commitment-phobic) partners' nonsense, and emancipating themselves on the dance floor, having a great time while they're at it. (Of course, chanting 'if you like it, then you should put a ring on it' twelve times does tend to reinforce another set of patriarchal concepts of property and ownership, but let's just stick to the song's catchiness).



▲ Regi Cherini, *Bernadette, Handbag series*, 2020, embroidery floss on calico, 38 X 30 cm. Photo by the artist.

The point is, women need to have the freedom to live without judgement.

Cherini is one of a growing number of artists reclaiming media and techniques long dismissed by the gatekeepers of 'the contemporary' as being craft. This, of course, is nothing but élitism; for many decades, artists like Cherini have been sidelined, along with cartoonists, potters, and printmakers, for being too... what? Practical? Skilled? Direct? As ever, it is folly to attempt to explain the arbitrary and superficial decisions of gatekeepers and tastemakers, but thankfully, given the slow rust of the commercial art world, artists like Cherini are now making these distinctions for themselves. Accessibility is one of the main attractions to thread for the artist. After trying her hand at drawing, painting and ceramics, textiles

clicked with the artist, and was the perfect media for investigating the artist's own simmering anger (her exact words) at the state of gender politics in Australia.

*All the Single Ladies* comprises works created within the previous eighteen months, divided into two distinct series of work. The first, composed of still life arrangements of the contents of different handbags, are a kind of portrait-in-miniature of their subjects. The contents of each are arranged in a considered composition against the raw material of the support, and complemented with the handbag in question, hanging below on a thread. At first this may be mistaken as a critique on consumerism, but upon closer examination, the viewer will notice the details of each handbag — scuff marks, signs of wear, stuck zippers

— regardless of contents. Even with this extra metanarrative, we are still left with an incomplete picture of the subject, as if the contents themselves are arranged in the negative spaces left by the absent women. We are invited to read, to theorise and to speculate based on these clues, but of course this is folly, for such details only offer a sketch of the subject. Once again, Cherini demonstrates the constant assessment to which women are subject. By exposing the (private) contents of the handbag, itself an object associated with both a woman's femininity and her wealth (or lack thereof), Cherini is puckishly asking the viewer to draw their own conclusions, thus implicating the viewer in the objectification of the subject. This is a deft demonstration of sleight of hand. Were Cherini to engage in



Top to bottom: ▶ Regi Cherini, *Hannah*, *Handbag* series, 2020, embroidery floss on calico, 38 X 30 cm. Photo by the artist. ▶ Regi Cherini, *Georgina*, *Handbag* series, 2020, embroidery floss on calico, 38 X 30 cm. Photo by the artist. ▶ Regi Cherini, *Saturday Night In*, *All the Single Ladies* series, 2019, embroidery floss on calico, 38 X 27.5. Photo by Michael Marzik.

CHERINI DEMONSTRATES THE CONSTANT ASSESSMENT TO WHICH WOMEN ARE SUBJECT. BY EXPOSING THE (PRIVATE) CONTENTS OF THE HANDBAG, ITSELF AN OBJECT ASSOCIATED WITH BOTH A WOMAN'S FEMININITY AND HER WEALTH (OR LACK THEREOF), CHERINI IS PUCKISHLY ASKING THE VIEWER TO DRAW THEIR OWN CONCLUSIONS, THUS IMPLICATING THE VIEWER IN THE OBJECTIFICATION OF THE SUBJECT.

a more traditional form of portraiture of each subject, the viewer's assessments of each woman would be much more overt, and therefore modifiable; we are used to, and perhaps even enjoy, the evaluation of attractiveness, sexiness, desirability. It is a conversation deeply codified, couched in identity politics and the mass media. Any beauty magazine fashion blog or reality TV show arms us with a framework, an assessment criteria matrix, for such discussions. Even in absence of the subjects, Cherini makes us realise that we are still judging, still assessing.

If the first set of works operate in the sphere of portraiture, Cherini's second set of work does so within the paradigm of self-portraiture, and as such exposes the artist herself. Each work operates as a kind of tableaux for Cherini, with objects arranged in a small narrative composition. Items of both the mundane (frozen meals, cat food, Tim Tams) and the personal







Regi Cherini, *Shopping List*, *All the Single Ladies* series, 2019, embroidery floss on calico, 38 X 30 cm. Photo by Michael Marzik



Regi Cherini, *Friday Night Out*, *All the Single Ladies* series, 2019, embroidery floss on calico, 32 X 27.5 cm. Photo by Michael Marzik.

EACH WORK OPERATES AS A KIND OF TABLEAU FOR CHERINI, WITH OBJECTS ARRANGED IN A SMALL NARRATIVE COMPOSITION. ITEMS OF BOTH THE MUNDANE (FROZEN MEALS, CAT FOOD, TIM TAMS) AND THE PERSONAL (CONDOMS, TABLETS, VIBRATORS) APPEAR INTERMITTENTLY, EACH WORKING AS A KIND OF SHORT STORY, IN TURNS MUNDANE, OPTIMISTIC, CYNICAL, FUNNY, AND MATTER-OF-FACT.

[condoms, tablets, vibrators] appear intermittently, each working as a kind of short story, in turns mundane, optimistic, cynical, funny, and matter-of-fact. Like the first series of works, Cherini's self-portraits are comments about the visibility of women, about being seen and being heard, and about representation. Both series of works demonstrate the complexity of the female experience, particularly when considered in stark relief to the mass media, which seems to still insist upon categorisation, boiling women down into either mother, saint or whore, stereotypes which are completely inadequate in representing the female experience.

Cherini's work, which is at once autobiographical and universal, is a series of snapshots framed by time (the artist's Saturday night) or physical space (the contents of her handbag), which act as an insight into a very frank, very real version of womanhood. This is not geared toward attracting men and their silliness; this is not a life that is entirely predicated upon assumptions of marriage, children, or even coupling. *All the Single Ladies* is, at its core, a series of still lives that are at once joyous, playful, ordinary, human, and subversive, a multivalent and multifaceted (self) portrait of the contemporary woman.

Jonathan McBurnie



AUTHOR: Moira Simpson

# ANNE JACKSON

## Gender Politics and Witches

ARTIST PROFILE



▲  
*Be a Good Girl*, 1995, 76 x 63 cm, knotted tapestry; cotton, linen, synthetic yarns. Photo by the artist

*Witchcraft persecution was at its height in early modern Europe between 1450 and 1750. Several scholars have estimated the number of people - women, men and even children- executed for witchcraft was between 40,000 and 60,000. This history and associated personal stories, cultural concepts, historical imagery and magic symbols have fascinated tapestry weaver Anne Jackson for the past twelve years and formed the basis for her Witchcraft Series.*





*Reclining Nude*, 1991, 76 x 91 cm, knotted tapestry; cotton, linen, synthetic yarns. Photo by the artist.



*Leaving Eden I*, 2003, 130 x 170 cm, knotted tapestry; cotton, linen, synthetic yarns. Photo by the artist.

‘Double, double, toil and trouble, fire burn and cauldron bubble’. These are the words uttered by the three witches in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, a source that has given us an enduring image of witches as old crones, stirring a cauldron and casting evil spells. Similar examples of witches are personified in folklore, literature, and film: in Hans Christian Andersen’s *Hansel and Gretel*, the Wicked Witch of the West in *The Wizard of Oz*, and the Seawitch in *The Little Mermaid*, to name a few. Other depictions show witches as beautiful, such as the evil stepmother in the Grimm brothers’ tale of *Snow White* or the benevolent Samantha in *Bewitched*, while Harry Potter stories feature several witches diverse in skills, personalities, actions, and appearances, ranging from smiling, motherly characters to beautiful and even sexy and sultry.

The reality is that throughout history, and in many cultures, ordinary people have been accused of witchcraft, mainly women, but also men and even children. They were often victims of superstition and the desire to find a cause of otherwise unexplained occurrences, illnesses, and deaths, but testimony against them could also be driven by personal animosity. If found guilty, punishment was often harsh: in Britain they were most commonly sentenced to death by hanging; in Europe, they were burned at the stake.

Scottish/American-born artist Anne Jackson studied Medieval History at St. Andrews University in Scotland, but decided instead to pursue a career as a textile artist. She set up a studio and gallery after graduating and a few years later attended art college at Middlesex University in London completing a Post-graduate Certificate in Constructed Textiles. A committed feminist, Jackson says that a lot of her early work was ‘made to “cock a snook” at the genteel associations of textile media ... with a sense of cosiness and comfort, plus patriarchy, of course ... My intention is to present an object which is visually arresting, and hopefully, thought-provoking.’ Her early works include colourful tapestries exploring gender politics often using irony and humour, such as *Reclining Nude* (1991) and *Be a Good Girl* (1995). She has also explored environmental issues such as in *Leaving Eden I* (2003), one of a pair of tapestries made for a site-specific exhibition in a biome at The Eden Project in Cornwall. These were shown in the ARTAPESTRY exhibition that toured Europe in 2005-8.

Although trained in the Gobelins tapestry technique of weaving weft through warp threads stretched taut on a vertical loom, Jackson developed a knotted weaving technique enabling her to create works of irregular shape. She describes it as ‘a hybrid of Gobelins tapestry weaving and the

macramé I learned as an American teenager’ which uses double half-hitch knotting. She does not use a loom or frame but instead works with pins on a board. The warp threads hang loose and are tensioned by hand during the weaving process and the tapestry is usually, though not always, made from top to bottom.

Jackson’s interest in witchcraft was sparked by encountering a memorial plaque mounted on the wall of the ruined gatehouse of Rougemont Castle, in Exeter, near where she lived in Devon, England. It read: ‘*The Devon Witches. In memory of Temperance Lloyd, Susannah Edwards, Mary Trembles, of Bideford died 1682, Alice Molland, died 1685. The last people in England to be executed for witchcraft, tried here & hanged at Heavitree. In the hope of an end to persecution and intolerance.*’ After this, she became interested in the history of persecution of witches in Europe, a topic that has sustained her weaving practice ever since. Jackson draws upon various historical source materials that recount the trials of people – mainly women and girls – who were accused of witchcraft, many of whom were sentenced to death. As she continued her work on the series, she developed imagery from woodcut illustrations used in sixteenth and seventeenth century trial pamphlets and other publications on witchcraft. Jackson notes that these materials illustrated ‘the evil deeds of witches





Anne Jackson, *Witch-Hunt: Maleficium (in memoriam)*, 2007, 170 x 180 cm, knotted tapestry, cotton, linen, synthetic yarns.  
Collection of the Art Endowment of the City of Aalborg, Denmark. Photo by Lynne Noble.

JACKSON DRAWS UPON VARIOUS HISTORICAL SOURCE MATERIALS THAT RECOUNT THE TRIALS OF PEOPLE – MAINLY WOMEN AND GIRLS – WHO WERE ACCUSED OF WITCHCRAFT, MANY OF WHOM WERE SENTENCED TO DEATH.

to a largely illiterate population' and 'the invention of the printing press exacerbated the process [of witch-persecution], by disseminating ideas and fears about witchcraft'.

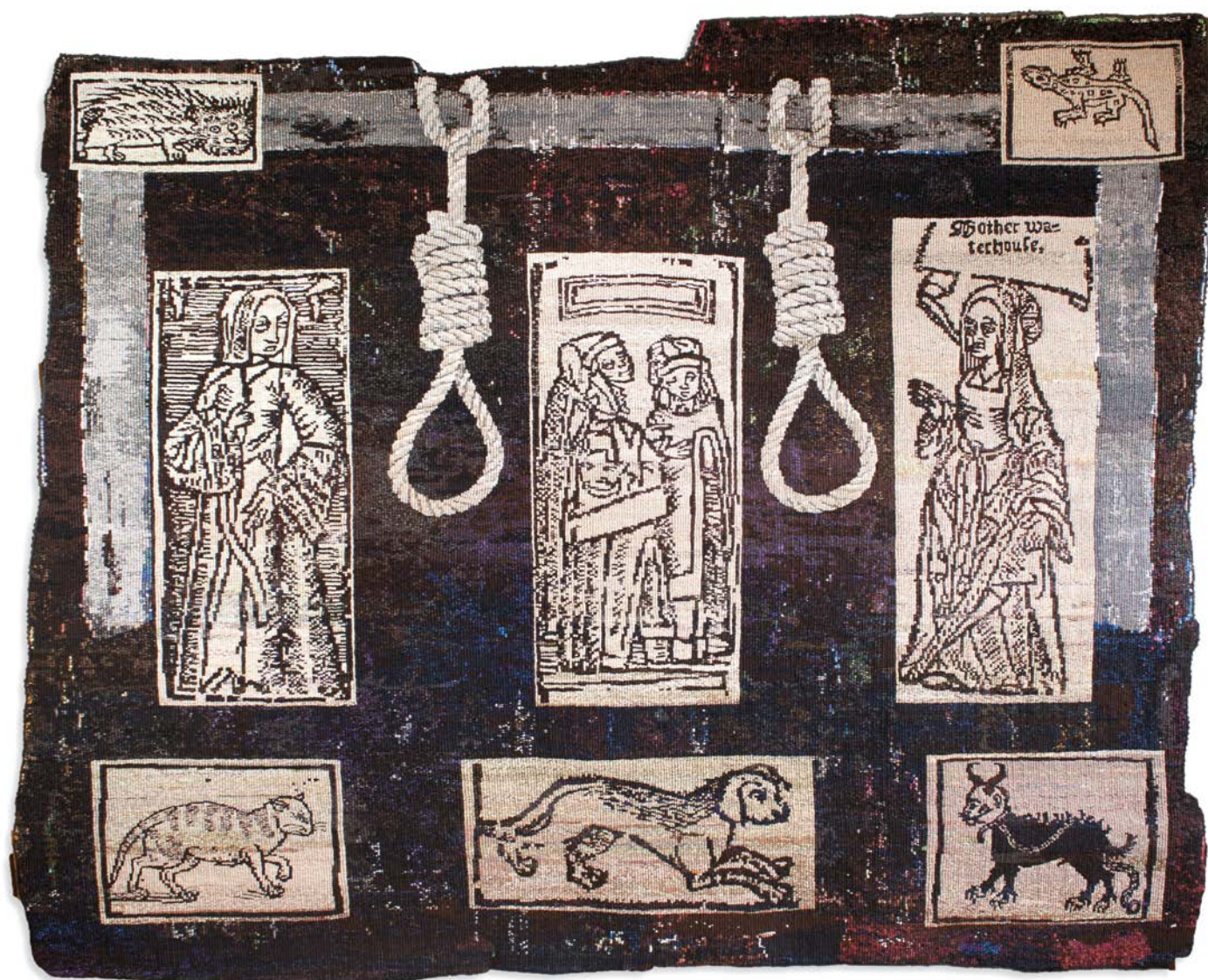
The subject matter and source materials have brought about a dramatic shift in her use of colour, now often restricted largely to blacks, whites, greys and neutrals. Her compositions depict illustrations of

accused witches, animals and objects associated with witchcraft, symbols from spell books, and images associated with death, such as nooses and skeletons; some include quotes from witness testimonies. The four images that she used in *Witch-Hunt: Maleficium (in memoriam)* made in 2007, are from the *Compendium Maleficarum*, published in 1608. Jackson explains that in these images

'The devil is shown consorting with a witch; three witches in the shape of animals ride off on a forked stick; a group of witches are shown shape-shifted into animal form, and two witches raise a storm, sacrificing a cockerel over a cauldron.'

The title and imagery of *Certaines Wytches, Chelmsford, Essex; 1566* (2009) are drawn from *The examination and confession of Certaines*





Anne Jackson, *Certaine Wytches*, Chelmsford, Essex; 1566, 2009, 196 x 156 cm, cotton, linen, synthetic yarns. Photo by Mei Lim. The figures show three Essex women from the same family, who were tried witches: Joan Waterhouse (left), the first woman in England to be hanged for witchcraft, and her mother Agnes Waterhouse (right) and grandmother, Eve (centre). Photo by Mei Lim.

*Wytches at Chensforde in the Countie of Essex.... 1566*, the earliest known published account of an English witch-trial. This latter tapestry commemorates three Essex women from the same family, who were tried as witches: Joan Waterhouse, her mother, Agnes Waterhouse, and her grandmother, Eve. Agnes Waterhouse was hanged as a result of this trial, the first woman to be executed for witchcraft in England. Jackson explains that behind her work is a desire 'to name and commemorate these individual women, who have been largely forgotten by history. Agnes Waterhouse, among many others, was unjustly executed, for imaginary crimes. I try to create at least a few moments of memory for her, and for them.'

In her 2017 tapestry, *Grace Thomas & Temperance Lloyd*: "Why dost thou weep for me?" Jackson returned to the trials of the women known as 'the Devon witches' (also referred to as 'the Bideford witches'), this time focusing on Temperance Lloyd, who was accused of being the leader. The text and imagery are drawn from the testimony of Grace Thomas, one of the witnesses, recorded in the trial pamphlet, 'A True and Impartial Relation of the Confessions of Three Witches', reproduced in Gent, F. 'The Trial of the Bideford Witches'. Thomas claimed that Lloyd had entered her bedroom with the devil, pinched her and stuck pins in her, and left a doll or 'poppet', in her bed. She also said that Lloyd turned herself into a cat, and that the devil in the form of a

magpie beat against her window. Other images suggest thresholds and lintels with depictions of original witch-marks from a house in The Mint, Exeter.

Jackson's use of a knotted weaving technique is very appropriate to the subject matter of her witchcraft series, as witches when found guilty, were often condemned to die by means of the knotted hangman's noose, an image that is prominent in *Certaine Wytches*, Chelmsford, Essex; 1566 (2009). Witches were also believed to use 'knot magic' to make charms – when untied they would release winds and raise storms that destroyed crops and put the lives of sailors and fishermen at peril. Jackson explores this theme in her 2016 tapestry *Tempestarii: Storm-*



raisers (atmospheric methane ppb) using a central image of a knotted rope with a quote from *Daemonologie* (1603), written by King James 6th of Scotland and 1st of England. The imagery is drawn from an illustration from the contemporaneous *Newes from Scotland* pamphlet showing the King's ship being sunk, allegedly by the spells of tempestarii, or storm-raising witches, two of whom are shown in an image taken from a woodcut in the *Compendium Maleficarum* by M. Guazzo (1608). Other images refer to 'a Swiss tale that witches could raise hailstorms to damage crops, using sheaves of hay, birds and frogs. The bound ears

of wheat shown were drawn from a good-luck/fertility charm made by a local Devon witch and used in "Crying the Neck", a harvest ritual currently performed yearly on a local Devon farm.' In this tapestry, Jackson also includes modern references to climate change. Microscope images are of phytophthora cells, a fungus that causes potato blight, sudden oak death and other diseases. Numerical figures in red show climate-change data over five or six decades to 2015, such as the increase of methane in the atmosphere, the rise in sea-surface temperature, land-surface temperature rise, and average sea-level rise.

Another symbol that features in some of Jackson's work is the apple. The fruit has had various connotations throughout history: the forbidden fruit of the Garden of Eden, a symbol of fertility, pleasure and sexual desire, and an apple cut in half was used in love charms. Poison apples were also thought to be used by witches, a reference seen in the Grimm brothers' tale of *Sneewittchen* or Snow White, in which the wicked stepmother practises witchcraft and gives the young girl a poisoned apple. In *Once Upon a Time* (2018), Jackson references the trial of Elizabeth Style, of Bayford, Somerset, who was tried for witchcraft at Taunton



▲ Anne Jackson, Grace Thomas & Temperance Lloyd: "Why dost thou weep for me?", 2017, 160 x 150 cm, cotton, linen, synthetic yarns. Photo by Mei Lim.





▲ Anne Jackson, *Tempestarii: Storm-raisers (atmospheric methane ppb)*, 2016, 170 x 164 cm, knotted tapestry; cotton, linen, synthetic yarns. Photo by Mei Lim.

JACKSON'S USE OF A KNOTTED WEAVING TECHNIQUE IS VERY APPROPRIATE TO THE SUBJECT MATTER OF HER WITCHCRAFT SERIES, AS WITCHES WHEN FOUND GUILTY, WERE OFTEN CONDEMNED TO DIE BY MEANS OF THE KNOTTED HANGMAN'S NOOSE

in 1664, accused of poisoning a child with an apple. Text on the tapestry quotes from both the Snow White fairy tale and the account of Elizabeth Style's trial.

Testimony of witnesses was often flimsy and could be driven by personal animosity, jealousy or a desire for revenge. Jackson's 2010 tapestry, *Ursula Kempe, St. Osyth, Essex, 1582*, references a woman 'who was accused of using magic to cure a neighbour's child, and to treat rheumatism. Kempe was tried for witchcraft in the village of St. Osyth, Essex, found guilty, and hanged in 1582. The words on the tapestry are from the original witch-trial pamphlet quoting a healing ritual that Kempe performed on the child: 'ah, good child, how art thou loden (laden)'. The image of the skeleton portrays one that was dug up in St. Osyth in 1929 and reputed to be hers – at the time, it became a popular tourist attraction.

During witch trials in England, as well as hearing from adult witnesses, it was acceptable to hear the testimony of children. At Kempe's trial, the neighbour's eight-year-old son was one of those who spoke and Kempe's own son, Thomas Rabbet, also gave testimony. Thomas said that she had four 'familiar spirits' (two cats, a lamb and a toad called Tyffin, Jacke, Tyttey, and Pygine) who 'did her bidding'. Jackson drew images of them in a childlike manner and they are depicted in *Ursula Kempe, St. Osyth, Essex, 1582* and in *The Child Witnesses: "The enformation of Thomas Rabbet, of the age of viii yeres or thereabouts"* (2013).

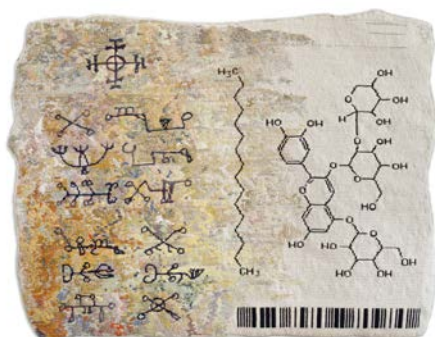


▲ Anne Jackson, *Ursula Kempe, St. Osyth, Essex, 1582*, 2010, 174 x 176 cm, knotted tapestry; cotton, linen, synthetic yarns. Photo by Mei Lim.





▲ Anne Jackson, *The Child Witnesses: "The enformation of Thomas Rabbet, of the age of viii yeres or thereabouts"*, 2013, 69 x 92 cm, knotted tapestry, cotton, linen, synthetic yarns. Made for the 62 Group of Textile Artists exhibition, *Small Talk*, at the Constance Howard Resource Centre, Goldsmiths, University of London. Photo by Mei Lim.



▲ Anne Jackson, *Alchemists*, 2011, 72 x 95 cm, cotton, linen, synthetic yarns. Photo by Mei Lim.

Both tapestries are framed by words reproduced from the original St. Osyth witch-trial pamphlets.

In *Alchemists*, Jackson explores historical and contemporary links between 'witchcraft' and science. On the left are symbols used by medieval alchemists and early scientists, including the personal seal of Dr. John Dee, Queen Elizabeth I's alchemist. Centre and right are symbols 'for a long-chain hydrocarbon (biofuel), and for anthocyanin, a type of plant pigment whose synthesis is associated with

Vitamin C' which represent the recent research interests of a professor of plant physiology, whose university identification barcode is also shown.

Jackson presented works from the *The Witchcraft Series* in a solo exhibition *Certain Wytches: Fear, Myth and Magic* at the Museum in the Park in Stroud, in 2017 and at The Jubilee Gallery, Devon Guild of Craftsmen, alongside artefacts on loan from the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic, in Boscastle, Cornwall. Since then, she has continued to explore the subject of witchcraft persecutions.

In 2021 she began a new tapestry, '*The Witchcraft of Elizabeth Styles of Bayford, Widow*' (*The History of Witches and Wizards*, 1720). For this she drew upon material from '*Saducismus Triumphatus or Full and Plain Evidence Concerning Witches and Apparitions*', a book written by Joseph Glanvil and published posthumously in 1681. In particular, this tapestry depicts

references to the trial of Elizabeth Style of Somerset. Style claimed that she and a number of other women would meet in the woods with the devil. Together they would dance and feast, curse their enemies, and stick thorns in poppets baptised by the devil. According to her account, the devil would appear in various guises, including in the form of a cat, rat, or giant fly; while in another story, he appeared as a toad. The photos here show preparatory studies of these images which Jackson produced before beginning work on the final, large-scale version.

Jackson's research and exploration of witchcraft began with 'the historical phenomenon of witch-persecution, and the wider metaphors which the subject evokes'. As her thoughts on the subject developed, she became more aware of 'the way threads of witch-belief weave through contemporary



AUTHOR: Moira Simpson



▲ ▼ Anne Jackson, the devil in various guises, preparatory studies made for a major piece of work entitled 'The Witchcraft of Elizabeth Styles of Bayford, Widow' (The History of Witches and Wizards, 1720)', 2021, cotton, linen, synthetic yarns. Photos by Mei Lim.

HER COMPOSITIONS DEPICT ILLUSTRATIONS OF ACCUSED WITCHES, ANIMALS AND OBJECTS ASSOCIATED WITH WITCHCRAFT, SYMBOLS FROM SPELL BOOKS, AND IMAGES ASSOCIATED WITH DEATH, SUCH AS NOOSES AND SKELETONS.



▲ Anne Jackson in her studio, 2021. Photo by Phil Smith

Western culture'... 'At first, I thought of what I was doing primarily as an act of commemoration, for those executed for witchcraft over hundreds of years. Later I also began to see the idea as representing our contemporary fears, of the unknown and of the "other"; and as a metaphor for the ways in which we try to exert control over our lives, our world, and our futures.' She continues to explore and represent 'the power that the idea of "the witch" holds in our culture, both as metaphor for our fears, and as representation of social injustice towards women', and has become increasingly aware of the development of the idea of the witch into metaphors that are used culturally and politically against women. 'The "witch-hunt" is an idea that persists, both in accounts of historic witch-trials, and modern scandals and investigations.'

It is indeed fascinating and discomfiting to reflect on the ways in which the concept and language of witches and witchcraft continue to feature in the modern day, even being weaponised within the contemporary political landscape. As Jackson notes: 'Not only is "the witch" an important figure in the current landscape of art, literature and film, but she thrives in our daily language, and in political discourse. When Margaret Thatcher died in 2013 the London band Fat White Family posed with a home-made banner reading "Ding-dong, the witch is dead." We all hear President Donald Trump revisiting the idea of the "witch-hunt" on a daily basis.'

Here in Australia in 2011, we

saw our own example of this personification of a woman as a witch when opposition leader Tony Abbott addressed a crowd of 3,000 demonstrators opposed to the proposal by the government of Australia's first female Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, to introduce a carbon tax. A placard waved by a demonstrator standing immediately behind Abbott showed a black silhouette of a witch on a broomstick with the words 'Ditch the Witch'. Jackson sees the persistence of links between witchcraft and misogynistic views towards women as a reflection of contemporary efforts to dominate and control women, a process that is greatly facilitated by modern digital communication technologies. She observes that 'the early production of books, after the invention of the printing-press, was key to the spread of witch-belief and witch-trials across Europe, and eventually the American colonies. I saw this as a powerful parallel to our modern tabloid press, and now, social media.' Clearly, witch-hunts are not a thing of the past but continue to this day in a different form and with different outcomes.

**Moira Simpson**

[www.evocativearts.com.au](http://www.evocativearts.com.au)

Details of artworks and quotations by the artist are taken from personal communications with the artist, and from the texts of *The Witchcraft Series: Commemoration & Metaphor*, an oral presentation given by the artist, and the book/catalogue *A. Jackson, Witch, Hexe, Sorciere: Works from the Witchcraft Series* (2017), which is available by post from the artist, priced £12.00 plus p&p. e-mail [annejackson.smirnoff@btinternet.com](mailto:annejackson.smirnoff@btinternet.com) for details.



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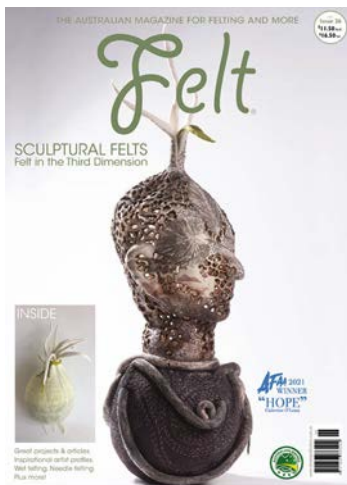
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# AboutFace

*The world was impacted by the global pandemic in March/April 2020 causing the closure of businesses and public buildings, the cancellation of sports events, performing arts and exhibitions, and the introduction of stay-at-home policies, social distancing and the wearing of masks to control the spread of the virus.*

▲  
Lulu Geraghty (Australia), *Alienation*,  
2020, crocheted and felted wool with acrylic painted eyes.



ONE HUNDRED AND FOUR SUBMISSIONS WERE RECEIVED FROM SIXTY-FOUR ARTISTS, NOT JUST FROM ACROSS AUSTRALIA BUT ALSO FROM AS FAR AWAY AS INDONESIA, INDIA, BANGLADESH, ITALY, POLAND, SLOVENIA, NIGERIA, ZIMBABWE, SOUTH AFRICA, ARGENTINA, USA AND THE UK.



▲ Sharon Laycock (Australia),  
*Particulate Matters*, 2021, denim,  
synthetic pom poms, ribbon.

In March and April 2020 when Australians were enduring the first weeks of lockdown, artisan Gallery in Brisbane developed a number of ways to engage digitally with audiences including the creation of a suite of online workshops, an online retail store and an international call out and web-based exhibition. They also created the *artisan at home* Facebook page to enable members of the craft and design community 'to share what you are working on in your homes and studios'. From discussions within this group, the idea of an exhibition of face masks developed.

The surgical mask – familiar as personal protective equipment (PPE) used by those working in medicine and dentistry had suddenly become a feature of many peoples' lives, a requirement in many places, and a symbol of political differences in others. Patterns and advice about the best materials to use to make face masks abounded on the Internet for those who want to make protective masks for themselves and their families, while designing, making and selling masks created a new line of commerce for others. Masks soon became a new form of attire – an unwelcome but necessary form of PPE for most, but a fashion statement, a form of personal creative expression or artistic activism for others.

Cassandra Lehman, curator and deputy director of artisan, launched the project by encouraging makers internationally to explore this evolving form of face mask, 'to make, remodel, rework, embellish and decorate the simple home-made surgical mask as a creative reflection of the current global experience'. She invited submissions for an online exhibition of face masks made by artists to express their responses to this new, shocking

reality that we all faced as the global crisis spread to encompass almost every country. 'My intention was to capture the immediacy and the commonality of, for the first time in living history, facing this together as a global community.' She created an online submission form inviting makers to send photographs of their masks, and used her networks to distribute the callout via social media and email seeking submissions that were to be shared on the website anonymously.

Lehman was surprised by the extent of the response: one hundred and four submissions were received from sixty-four artists, not just from across Australia but also from as far away as Indonesia, India, Bangladesh, Italy, Poland, Slovenia, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Argentina, USA and the UK. She accepted all of them and they were displayed online in *AboutFace*, an online COVID mask exhibition. Reflecting the arbitrary nature of COVID-19 infections, the masks were initially displayed without attribution, but with an accompanying list of artists' names.

In a second phase of the project, a physical exhibition of selected works was displayed in a window exhibition at Artisan from 10 July to 22 August 2020. These necessarily had to be relatively local, restricted by freight and travel and represented a Queensland response to the crisis. Again, these were displayed anonymously but accompanied by a list of names of the participating artists and were offered for sale at the uniform price of \$250 each, as part of the gallery's 'level playing field' approach. A QR code displayed in the window linked to the online exhibition and Lehman notes that 'Our security cameras showed many masked patrons on their daily exercise





▲  
Lise Macdermott (United Kingdom), *Allegory of a Mask*, 2020, woven leaves and paper.



▲  
Sharon Laycock (Australia), *A Cold's Bridle*, 2020, synthetic fabric, pvc, metal rivets, wire, metal rings, grosgrain ribbon, cotton fabric.



▲  
Lulu Geraghty (Australia), *Don't Touch Your Face*, 2020, crocheted and felted wool with acrylic painted eyes

walks stopping to scan the code and ponder the works.'

A number of the displayed works have been acquired by the State Library of Queensland with the makers' names being revealed only after the acquisitions had been finalised. At a closing event, by which time restrictions had been partially lifted, gallery staff invited the artists to the gallery for a 'grand reveal' at which they announced the names of who had made each mask and these attributions were then added to the website. A small selection of the masks is shown in these pages. All 104 masks can be seen over two pages at <https://www.aboutfaceartisan.org/> and <https://www.aboutfaceartisan.org/page2> Facing the Times, an exhibition essay by Sophia Cai is also available on the website.

Lise Macdermott's *Allegory of a Mask* is made from leaves from her garden which she has woven together and then decorated with sketches of figurative elements drawn from the paintings of Ambrogio Lorenzetti [c. 1290-1348], an artist of the Sienese school. The wearing of masks in response to COVID-19 is a modern-day manifestation of an event that we know all too well from history books, for Ambrogio Lorenzetti was one of an estimated fifty million people who died of bubonic plague when the 'Black Death' pandemic swept through Europe, Africa and Asia in the fourteenth century. For so long a fact of history that we have read about and one we considered a nightmare scenario, the global spread of a virus causing illness and death has become a horrible nightmare for all of us today.

Several of the mask makers focused on the virus itself and the practical purpose of the masks in seeking to thwart its journey into our airways. The wearing of medical masks for long periods day after day has caused severe discomfort and skin injury to health workers. For Sharon Laycock, this brought to mind the 'scold's bridle', an implement of torture and punishment used in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries in Britain and its colonies. Women who were considered to be gossips, scolds, or witches, were forced to wear the metal devices which had metal spikes in the mouth and stopped the wearer from eating or speaking. Her second mask, *Particulate Matters*, is made from brightly coloured synthetic pom poms stitched onto a denim base fabric, visually emphasising the virus which is too small to be visible to the naked eye. 'We don't normally give much thought to all the tiny nanoparticles and molecules that surround us, but we become hyper aware during a pandemic. The mask is to protect us from the unseen enemy. I have visually represented this enemy with spiky pom poms joyfully attaching themselves to a face mask.'

Lulu Geraghty, Agustina Tri Wahyuningsih, and Vanessa Finnerty addressed the anxiety we all felt, especially during the early stages of the pandemic and lockdown. Geraghty experienced anxiety about the possibility of being infected and a feeling of being 'overwhelmed by a changing list of safety rules'; and like many textile artists, she turned to her art practice to distract herself. 'The process of making art became a welcome distraction, providing purpose and moments of joy during a strange and fearful time.' Her crocheted and felted masks with its multiple bulbous protrusions some embedded with





Vanessa Finnerty (Australia), *Anxiety*, 2020, lace curtain fabric, zip ties, cotton thread.

## THE WEARING OF MASKS IS RESPONSE TO COVID-19 IS A MODERN-DAY MANIFESTATION OF AN EVENT THAT WE KNOW ALL TOO WELL FROM HISTORY BOOKS.

red and some with eyes, simultaneously evokes the living and multiplying virus particles attaching to the fabric of a mask and also the stuffy feeling and itchy eyes which are amongst the symptoms of someone infected.

Similarly, Agustina Tri Wahyuningsih found herself out of work and spending all her time at home, so she took out her sewing machine and began making dolls and cloth masks to sell. The colourful spikey mask is a humorous message to others 'to stay away from me'.

Vanessa Finnerty 'felt inundated with conflicting advice and struggled with staying informed while trying not to feel overwhelmed; particularly at the start of the pandemic lock down. I felt constricted and compelled to do the right thing but was unsure if what I was doing was right.' Her use of lace fabric embroidered with the words 'Save Lives' suggests the acknowledgement of the need for masks to inhibit the spread of infection but the lack of informed advice about what materials are best to use – even now, over a year later, there are many masks made, sold, and worn that provide little protection due to the use of the wrong materials.

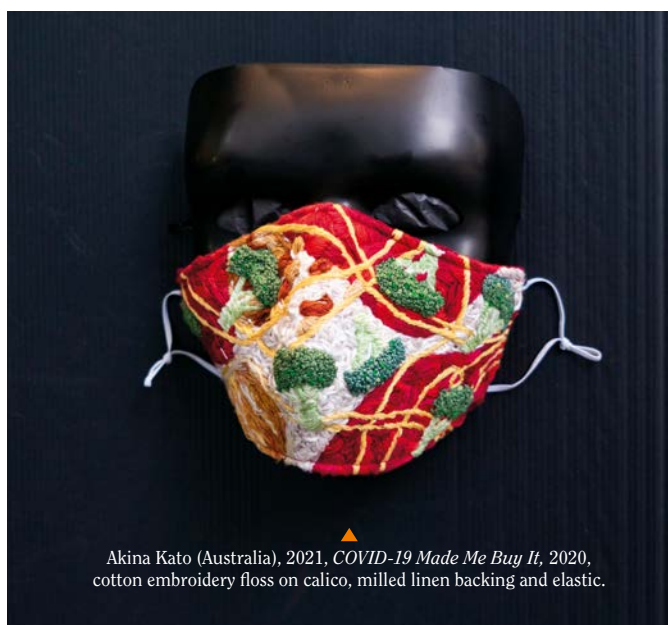
*AboutFace* provided an opportunity for these artists to use their creative skills to explore protective masks from a variety of perspectives, and to express themselves and convey their emotions and experiences of the pandemic as well as observations of some of the social, political and environmental aspects.

*Coronam Mysteria* by sisters Selene Cochrane and Natell Webb (working under the name TangleHAUS) is a decorative leather mask embellished with stitching and metal rivets and is intended to convey 'not only the mystery that surrounds this virus in many, many aspects but also the feeling that as artists and creators, we have been left unheard and silenced.'

Akina Kato used humour to tackle a serious subject based upon personal experience. The stitched imagery on her mask shows broccoli and bread, a reference to the panic buying which led to supermarket shelves being stripped of various staples 'such as rice, pasta, broccoli, canned foods such as tomatoes and beans, and bread (making supplies). This demand has been driven by a need to keep nutritious food on the table



Selene Cochrane and Natell Webb (Australia), *Coronam Mysteria*, 2020, leather, woven thread and metal rivets.



Akina Kato (Australia), 2021, *COVID-19 Made Me Buy It*, 2020, cotton embroidery floss on calico, milled linen backing and elastic.



Catherine Conaty (Australia), *What Lies Above* (top) and interior of *What Lies Beneath* (below), 2020, stained glass shards, mirror, thin-set mortar, plastic.

despite the uncertain times ahead.' For Kato, though, the experience had an added element of distress and concern. 'As an Asian-Australian, going out for grocery shopping has become nerve-wracking given the rise of xenophobic sentiments. Despite these sentiments, these foods which are staples of global cuisines remain in high demand. Optimistically I hope this is a quiet nod towards Australia's multicultural society.'

Paula Quintela takes an ironic look at the face mask, noting that while it provides just 'a thin layer of protection against the dangerous virus destroying our world ... infecting millions, killing tens of thousands and locking us inside the house for months', the pandemic 'has allowed the planet to recover from a more invasive power of destruction, us.'

Catherine Conaty's double-sided mask *What Lies Above / What Lies Beneath* gives visual form to the function of the mask as a barrier to the virus while also addressing the role of mask-wearing in reducing anxiety.

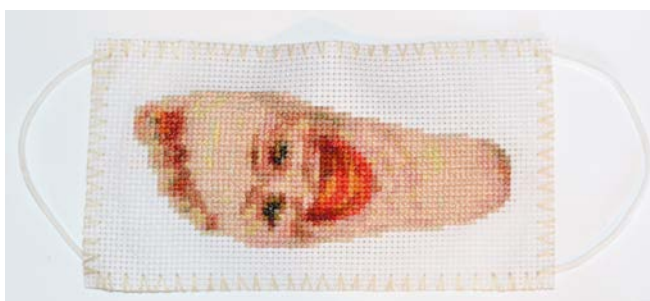
'*What Lies Above*: The mirror elements of this mask are for self-reflection and a reminder of the internal struggles that people have had with Covid19. The shards of the viruses are razor sharp, and are hopefully contained by the barrier. Like most people I know, I have had my ups and downs with some anxiety during this time. To be able to don a mask when venturing out for groceries makes a huge difference to elevated stress levels. I have learned from this time that I enjoy solitude far more than I thought I would, as I can create every day, which is peaceful and relaxing!

'*What Lies Beneath*: This shows the duality of the mask protecting us from coronavirus, and protecting others around us from our bugs. We are teeming with germs and bugs, on a scale that the world has never considered! My mask is a visual reminder of the 'unseen' things that we carry around. The external coating in mirror gives nothing away to the viewer, just as a person may not always appear sick. When I think of mask wearing this way, it evokes feelings of gratitude to my community.'

Leah Emery's contribution to *AboutFace* was a mask that is overtly critical of political responses both international and domestically. 'One of the most painful things to watch unfold, as a global audience member of the media show that was COVID-19, was the tone-deaf reaction from many governments of the West.'

In comparison with most other countries around the world, we have been unbelievably fortunate in Australia in the limited number of infections and deaths from

Leah Emery (Australia), *Foot in Mouth Mask*, 2020, embroidery thread on aida cloth.





▶ Paula Quintela  
(Australia), *Skin*, 2020,  
plastic, snake skin,  
insect parts.



MASKS SOON BECAME A NEW  
FORM OF ATTIRE – AN UNWELCOME  
BUT NECESSARY FORM OF PPE FOR  
MOST, BUT A FASHION STATEMENT,  
A FORM OF PERSONAL CREATIVE  
EXPRESSION OR ARTISTIC  
ACTIVISM FOR OTHERS.

coronavirus. This is no doubt in great part due to the fast action of the federal and state governments in closing the international and domestic borders, imposing an immediate lockdown, establishing quarantine rules for returning travellers, limiting gatherings, and requiring all of us to implement safety measures including mask wearing, hand sanitising, social distancing, and COVID check-ins.

However, as Emery points out, there have also been some significant missteps. 'In Australia we were witness to religious exemptions for mass gathering, an excruciatingly reluctant cessation of football crowds, and internationally a far greater tragedy continues to unfold due to the dismissal of scientific advice, reason and logic. Every tragedy seems to result in so many political feet

being metaphorically shoved into many a governmental mouth with no end in sight. I have cross stitched an image of a whimsical vintage Halloween foot prop over the mouth region of my mask to indicate how nonsensical and confusing was the policy approach to our isolation. I am, however, eternally grateful that thanks to the public's considerations, Australia weathered the global pandemic as well as can be expected. Here's to hoping some lessons will be learned.'

**Moira G. Simpson**

[www.evocativearts.com.au](http://www.evocativearts.com.au)

All photographs courtesy of Artisan Gallery, Brisbane.





Australia

# Olga Cironis

## MATERIAL POWER

*Behind Each Look*, 2007, 260 × 250 × 600 cm, eucalypt  
branch, woollen blankets and cotton thread.





▲ Olga Cironis. Portrait  
by Robert Frith, Acorn  
Photo 2020.

*The woman sits, working at a loom. From her fingers unfurls a cloth made of many hues: umbers, russets, golds. The fibre is human hair; the weave composed of strands from disparate heads. For the performance piece Mountain of Words, contemporary artist Olga Cironis wove together locks of hair donated by audience members. As Cironis worked, she chatted with the donors, connecting together the material and stories of different people.*

Cironis was born in 1963 in Czechoslovakia to parents who had fled the Greek Civil War as refugees. In 1971, at nine years of age, Cironis and her family migrated across the globe to Sydney to start a new life. These experiences of migration, exclusion and the deeply-human search for belonging, thematically underpin her work. After graduating in the mid-1990s

from the Sydney College of the Arts with a Master of Visual Arts, a visit to Perth prompted Cironis to stay on, the sandy-shored city becoming the base from which she has forged a leading art practice. Over the past three decades, Cironis's work has been exhibited widely in Australia and internationally. In 2020-21, her work was showcased in three major solo exhibitions: *Forest of Voices* at the

Perth Institute of Contemporary Art (3 November 2020 – 10 January 2021); *Olga Cironis: Dislocation*, at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery at The University of Western Australia, in association with Perth Festival (27 February – 5 June 2021); and *Olga Cironis: This Space Between Us* at the Art Collective WA (20 March – 17 April 2021). In 2021, an extensive book showcasing her career, *Olga Cironis:*



▲ *Mountain of Words*, 2017, performance work with metal loom, speakers, amplifier, paper and hair, installation dimensions variable. Photo Rebecca Mansell.





▲ *Seeing Red*, 1999, animal bones, velvet and cotton thread, individual dimensions variable. Acorn Photo.

*This Space Between Us*, with articles written by Paola Anselmi, Jacqueline Millner and Lisa Slade, was published by Art Collective WA.

Cironis's work explores ideas of nationhood, identity and culture through the lens of being a migrant and a woman in contemporary Australian society. Across sculpture, installation, performance, photography and video, she draws sharp attention to the gaps that exist between the dominant narrative and unheard voices: those that are overlooked or silenced. The impetus, she explains, is the experience and witnessing of 'the injustice of how people – migrant people, women, children, people in poverty – are treated by others in our democratic system'.

An experimental approach to working with material characterises Cironis's work. Household fabrics, furniture, ornaments, tools, feathers and hair are treated to processes of assemblage, modification and augmentation. Working primarily with recycled materials, she sources supplies 'from everywhere – from the side of the road, second-hand shops or given to me'. She selects material for its symbolism and traces of past use. 'Everything I use needs to have a universal meaning. Materials have to be exploited, so that I can play with them and turn the meanings on their side. For example, if I start with a stool, I consider who may have owned or used one – not the farmer, more likely the gentry. Class, gender, political issues all come into consideration.'

A signature method of the artist is

the wrapping of objects with fabric to create sculptural pieces. The work *Seeing Red*, is formed of twenty-four animal bones, ranging from a large ram's skull to the intricate rib of a small mammal. Each structure is covered in rich velvet, stitched up to form delicate packages. A vibrant blood-red, their colour gestures to organs and interiors; their composition to taxidermy and ornaments. All at once the objects are fragile and violent, biological and cultural, signalling both life and death. A sense of unease imbues the forms which hint at murky, complex truths that lie beneath the exterior.

In *Under Cover*, nursery cots are covered with grey woollen blankets. Lined up in austere rows, their formation references institutional

settings, the government-issue cloth sparking conflicting associations of security and loss, warmth and segregation. Stripped of individuality, the beds powerfully signal forced compliance cemented by the haunting rallying call projected on the wall: 'If you're not with us, you're against us'.

Cironis's introduction to textiles began early in her life. Growing up, her mother was a cutter and sewer for the outdoor clothing company Paddy Pallin and brought home fabric off-cuts for the family to utilise for clothes-making. At school – as a girl, 'expected to sew and make home!' – Cironis learnt knitting, crocheting, embroidery and sewing, but 'I hated having to do them – it makes sense that I now subvert the mediums in my work'.

Today, it is the traditions and power of fabric that interest her. 'Fabric is where the home and nature begin. The process of making fabric is very organic. Army uniforms look so deadly and symbolise power, vulnerability, fear, death, impermanence – yet the camouflage design is originally based on nature.'

Tropes of children, war, domesticity, gender roles and the natural world repeat across Cironis's works. Baby dolls are swathed in military camouflage, faces obscured with shells, feathers, or stitched away altogether. In *Bouquet*, the features of a tapestry-covered doll are formed by found objects. In *Hollow Desires*, a

▼ *Under Cover*, 2002, installation dimensions variable, repurposed wooden cots, military blankets, cotton thread and castors with projected text.





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CIRONIS USES  
STITCH IN A WAY  
THAT DRAWS  
ATTENTION TO  
CONSTRUCTION:  
LINES ARE  
VISIBLE; TAILS  
OF COTTON  
THREAD ARE  
LEFT TO HANG  
— SEEMING  
TO GESTURE  
TO THE  
UNFINISHED  
NATURE OF  
THE SUBJECT  
MATTER.

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►  
*Bouquet*, 2020, 97 × 34 × 25 cm,  
repurposed mannequin, tapestry,  
porcelain and found objects.  
Acorn Photo.







▲  
*Hollow Desires*, 2016, 111 × 83cm, child's clothing, hair and cotton thread on military canvas. Acorn Photo.

camouflage baby onesie is laid out, like a deity, upon military canvas. In *Falling Into Your Arms*, two stock-horse saddles are adorned: one with a landscape tapestry, the other with military fabric. Both are fringed with feathers and gold thread. The material of the pair suggests the dual human and gendered activities of making craft, and making war.

Cironis uses stitch in a way that draws attention to construction: lines are visible; tails of cotton thread are left to hang – seeming to gesture to the unfinished nature of the subject matter. In *First Up*, a kitchen egg-beater is covered in checked orange woollen blanket; strings of red thread streaming below, anchoring the object within blank space. *Handmaiden* fuses a child's crutch and a branch together as a part-functional, part-organic tool embalmed in grey-woollen blankets, threads emerging from seams. In *Behind Each Look*, a sweeping flayed eucalypt tree is encased in blankets with each sharp twig individually wrapped.

Text is a central device in Cironis's practice. Works, including *Today I Am What You Want Me to Be*, *Why Are You Here?* and *I Did Not See It Coming*, spell out the phrases of their titles in letters cut from woollen blanket. In a form of collage, the words are stitched atop decorative fabrics, military canvas and domestic wooden furniture – the result a jostling



IN A FORM OF COLLAGE, THE WORDS ARE STITCHED ATOP DECORATIVE FABRICS, MILITARY CANVAS AND DOMESTIC WOODEN FURNITURE – THE RESULT A JOSTLING JUXTAPOSITION EVOKING THE PUSH-PULL OF FORGING SELFHOOD.

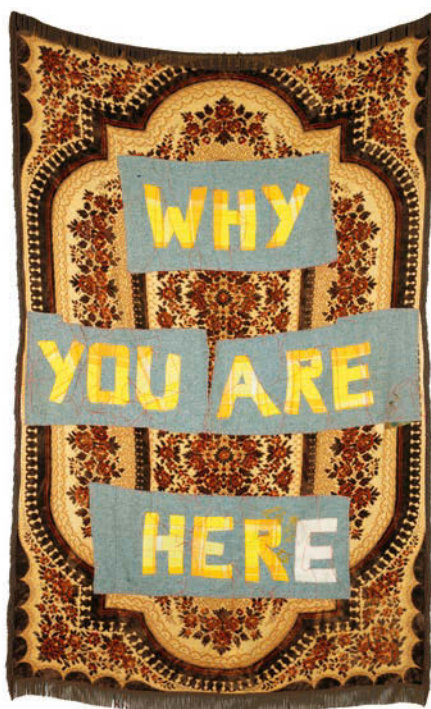
▲▼  
*Falling Into Your Arms*, 2018, 300 × 640 × 1200cm and 400 × 530 × 550cm, two repurposed stock horse saddles and tapestry, feathers, military fabric, cotton and gold thread. Acorn Photo.







▲ *First Up*, 2020, 30 × 10.5 × 9cm, repurposed utensil, woollen blankets and cotton thread. Acorn Photo.



▲ *Why Are You Here?*, 2018, 200 × 130 cm, woollen blankets and cotton thread on repurposed domestic fabric.



▲ *Today I Am What You Want Me to Be*, 2010, 35 × 68 × 36 cm, repurposed wooden furniture, foam, woollen blankets and cotton thread. Acorn Photo.



▲ *Holding*, 2018, 42 × 35 × 20 cm, acrylic and repurposed shelf. Acorn Photo.

juxtaposition evoking the push-pull of forging selfhood. 'Playing on words is important in my work. Text is more like a scream, it's not polite. I use it for impact, and to add another layer of meaning. It's also about talking to a predominately English-speaking audience from a bilingual background: meanings can be lost in translation very quickly. Text allows me to satirise the meaning behind words, turn meaning on its side.'

In *Holding*, an ornate Rococo-

styled shelf with a sleek acrylic top is attached to the wall, the verb of the title gracing the glossy surface. The object – merging history and modernity – is precariously fastened, but persists nevertheless. In *I Will Not Clean Your Home* a cry against subordination – gendered, ethnic – is made with a vinyl neckpiece.

Cironis's use of installation and performance provide another dimension to the experience of her works. Across her career she has

regularly invited the public to directly interact with her works. In *Handle Me Gently*, audience members could rearrange ambiguous mammal sculptures made of fabric, using in-built handles. *Hush*, for Sculpture by the Sea Cottesloe, invited people to view the sea from a gilded metal chair placed on the sand. For the installation *Forest of Voices*, people could share their intimate human stories of love, pain, fear and loss. These stories were later played

▼ *Handle Me Gently*, (detail) 2008, steel, foam, woollen blankets and cotton thread, individual dimensions variable. Photo Pascal Veyradier.





▼ *Hush*, 2020, 130 × 49 × 45 cm, aluminium and gold leaf.



as fragmented voices through suspended speakers to listeners sitting on red-velvet upholstered steel chairs, arranged so that some faced each other, and others away.

Cironis explains that this element of her work intentionally positions the audience as a contributor. 'The work is not protected, the audience can add meaning to feel close to it, the sense of being part of it. The audience can change the direction of the meaning by how they interact. Using audience

interaction can seduce them into a space where they leave a little of themselves behind.'

Like the many for whom a lock of their hair is now part of a woven composition representing the complex diversity of the Australian public. Or for whom the Indian Ocean is forever imbued with the sensation of sitting upon a splendid golden seat – looking outwards, in a quiet, free, moment. 'I want to make us think about how it is for other people and

for how we are in the world. The best way to do this is to make us think and question our place in the world, to communicate, through the artwork.'

The book about Olga Cironis's practice, *Olga Cironis: This Space Between Us*, published by Art Collective WA, is available at: [www.artcollectivewa.com.au](http://www.artcollectivewa.com.au)

**Nyanda Smith**  
Arts writer

▼ *Forest of Voices*, 2020, speakers and speaker wires, steel, velvet and cotton thread, installation dimensions variable. Acorn Photo.







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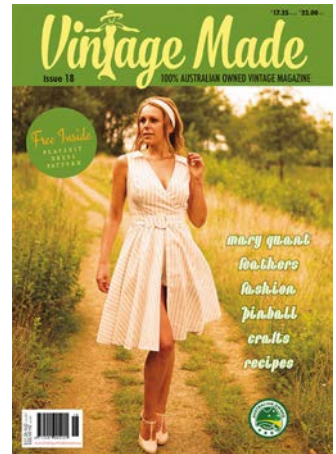
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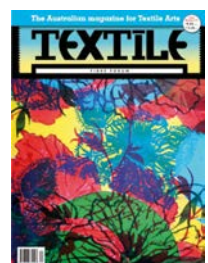
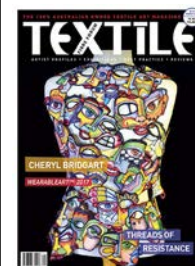


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# TEXTILES AT THE NGV TRIENNIAL

EXHIBITIONS



Richard Quinn, London (est. 2016), Richard Quinn, designer, *Look 2, ensemble*, 2020, satin, silk, (tulle), faux pearls, diamantés, buttons, glass (beads), (dress) 83 cm (centre back), 36 cm (waist, flat); (bumroll) 51 x 54 cm; (bodysuit) 196 cm (length), 30 cm (waist, flat); (handbag) 27 x 23 x 7.5 cm. Collection, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. (Purchased, NGV Gala 2018 Fund). Photo by Sean Fennessy.



*The second NGV Triennial at the National Gallery of Victoria (19 December, 2020-18 April, 2021) presented some eighty-six projects from over 100 artists and designers working across a multitude of disciplines. Regular contributor Inga Walton assesses the fashion and textile component.*

The participants selected for inclusion in the National Gallery of Victoria's second Triennial responded to the broad themes of Illumination, Reflection, Conservation and Speculation. Pandemic travel restrictions meant that the international cohort was banned from entering the country, and those who were interstate were snared by snap border closures and the threat of quarantine. With many projects affected, curators were forced to improvise and liaised with artists about the installation of their work via video conferencing, aided by detailed mock-ups, previews, and 3D visualizations. Opening after Melbourne's second and more punitive Stage 4 lockdown, the Triennial still fell foul of the third in February, 2021.

Only two overtly fashion-related works were included in this iteration of the Triennial. Tomo Koizumi, who worked as an independent costume designer before presenting his debut collection at New York Fashion week in 2019, was represented with *Look 27, top and skirt* (2020). The voluminous organza ensemble with 200 metres of cascading ruffles is Koizumi's version of a gay pride flag, and intended as a statement of inclusivity in difficult times. The Japanese singer Misa (Misaki Itō) wore a similar rainbow-hued gown by Koizumi when she performed at the opening ceremony of the Tokyo Olympic Games in July, 2021.

*Look 2, Ensemble* (2020) by English designer Richard Quinn is a tribute to the working-class tradition of London costermongers (street traders) in the late 19th century who formed



▲ ▼ Tomo Koizumi, Tokyo (est. 2011), Tomo Koizumi, *designer, Look 27, top and skirt*, 2019, polyester organza, (top) 12 cm (centre back), 43 cm (waist, flat); (skirt) 182 cm (centre back), 33 cm (waist, flat). Collection, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. (Purchased with funds donated by Krystyna Campbell-Pretty, AM, and Family; Tania and Sam Brougham; Tommy Hilfiger Australia; PVH Brands; Rob Gould; SIRAP Art Collective; and donors to the 2020 NGV Annual Appeal). (Installation image: Inga Walton).







▲ Cecilie Bendixen, (l-r) *Islands of seam lines*, 180 x 300 x 150 cm; *Circular Seam Lines*, 150 x 250 x 125 cm; *Tentative seam lines*, 120 x 200 x 100 cm; *Long seam lines*, 210 x 350 x 175 cm, from the *Cloud Formations* collection, 2020, polyvinylidene difluoride thread, polytetrafluoroethylene, LED, electrical componentry. Collection, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. (Purchased with funds donated by the Neilson Foundation, 2020). © Cecilie Bendixen (Installation image: Tom Ross)



▲ Cecilie Bendixen, *Tentative seam lines*, 2020, detail, from the *Cloud Formations* collection, 2020, polyvinylidene difluoride thread, polytetrafluoroethylene, LED, electrical componentry, 120 x 200 x 100 cm. Collection, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. (Purchased with funds donated by the Neilson Foundation, 2020). © Cecilie Bendixen (Installation image: Inga Walton).



societies to collect money for charity and hospitals. These 'pearlies' were so-called because they wore clothes decorated with found mother-of-pearl buttons to draw attention to their fundraising activities. Street sweeper Henry Croft (1861-1930) is acknowledged as the original 'Pearly King', with the first 'pearly society' formed in Finchley in 1911. Quinn's outrageous interpretation of this distinctive uniform sees the entire outfit smothered with embroidered diamantés, buttons, bugle beads and faux pearls, completely covering the face, legs, and hands. Referencing the hereditary nature of Pearly King and Queen titles, the Sex Pistols song of 1977, and his own namesake label, 'God Save the Quinn' is embroidered around the hemline.

Suspended above the NGV's 19th and 20th century international collection, Danish artist Cecilie Bendixen's *Cloud Formations* collection (2020) invited the viewer to contemplate how we perceive transience and the space between the material and the immaterial. This

'skyscape' consisted of four large illuminated textile 'clouds' hand-formed by the artist and her team over several months. The material qualities of each piece- texture, stiffness and translucency- are deftly worked, folded and stitched, then combined with the LED lights. The interior construction of each cloud, the frayed edges of the fabric, and the criss-crossing network of threads are clearly visible. As the viewer moves beneath the work, the textile appears to change and billow as the forces of gravity gradually tug and pull at the form, mimicking airflow.

English designer Faye Toogood's interdisciplinary practice spans interior, furniture, sculpture, fashion, textile and object design. She sees her work as following the tradition of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or a total work of art, whereby the interior- all works of art and design, and their display- synthesise to deliver the experience and meaning of her presentation. Her designs, including two large-scale tapestries, were presented alongside 17th century artworks from the NGV

Collection. In combination, they formed an ambitious tableau across two galleries in a sequence of three crafted spaces: Daylight, Candlelight and Moonlight. Toogood selected portraits, landscapes, and still lifes expressive of the enlightenment, family, intimacy and domestic interiors with her own work serving as a connecting device.

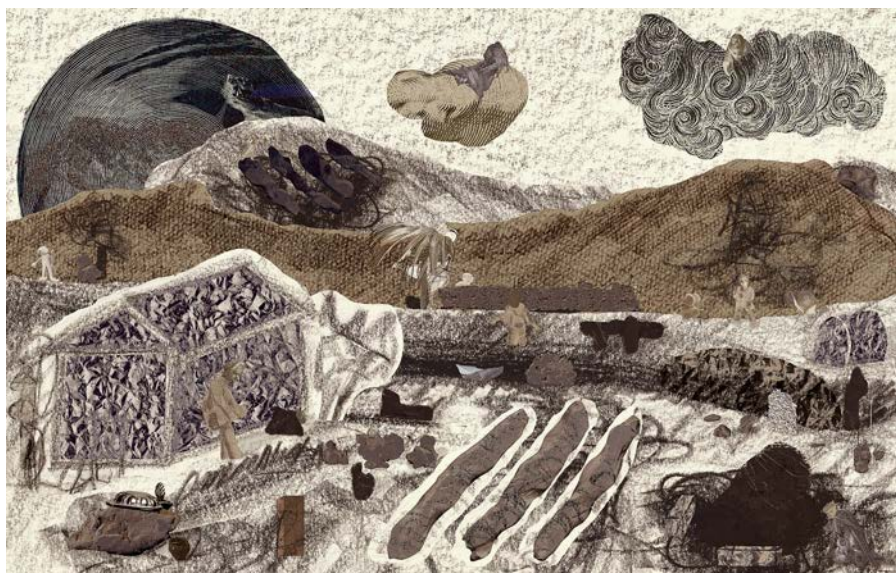
*Day Tapestry* (2020) presents a surreal, windblown landscape that incorporates motifs from the surrounding paintings such as a pastoral by Aelbert Cuyp (1620-91). Grapes, pomegranates and oysters reference Jan Davidsz. de Heem (1606-84), the pink roses and white linen napkin are drawn from Jean-François van Dael (1764-1840). The eerie *Night Tapestry* (2020) responded to elements present in the allegorical and genre prints on display by the likes of Hendrick Goltzius (1558-1616) and Jan Harmensz. Muller (1571-1628). The silvery grey tones of the landscape allude to the philosophical idea of the light of reason dawning over a world replete with Judeo-

THE INTERIOR CONSTRUCTION OF EACH CLOUD, THE FRAYED EDGES OF THE FABRIC, AND THE CRISS-CROSSING NETWORK OF THREADS ARE CLEARLY VISIBLE. AS THE VIEWER MOVES BENEATH THE WORK, THE TEXTILE APPEARS TO CHANGE AND BILLOW AS THE FORCES OF GRAVITY GRADUALLY TUG AND PULL AT THE FORM, MIMICKING AIRFLOW.



▲ Faye Toogood, *Day Tapestry*, 2020, wool, cotton, 273 x 654 x 1.5 cm. Collection, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. (Purchased with funds donated by Betsy Polasek; Susan Jones and James McGrath; Suzanne Kirkham; and donors to the 2020 NGV Annual Appeal). (Installation image: Inga Walton).





◀ Faye Toogood, *Night Tapestry*, 2020, wool, cotton, 284 x 470 x 1.5 cm. Collection, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. (Purchased with funds donated by Betsy Polasek; Susan Jones and James McGrath; Suzanne Kirkham; and donors to the 2020 NGV Annual Appeal). (Image: Angus Mill).

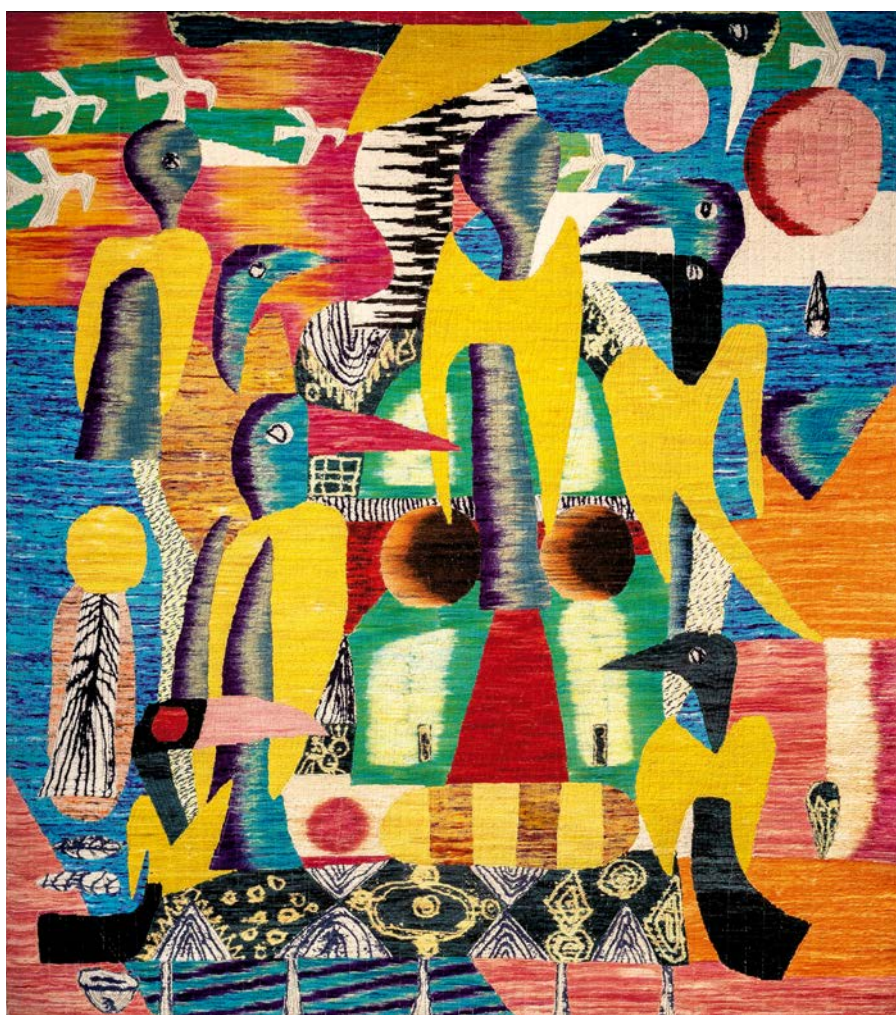
Christian concepts of heaven and earth, devised by a divine creator.

French artist Yann Gerstberger contributed two hand-dyed tapestries, *Queen Niya Yoruba Corona xxx2* and *Queen Niya Yoruba Corona xxx3* (both 2018), inspired by patterns found in Mexican popular culture, art history and nature. Based in Mexico, Gerstberger conceived the original technique used to produce this ongoing series of tapestries. It consists of forming colourful surfaces by gluing fibres of cotton mixed with industrial fabrics (preferably patterned or textured) on vinyl. The cotton fibres are dyed using a mixture of natural Mexican dyes such as cochineal, and industrial ones like Citocol that can be found in the supermarket. Within his designs, the artist references the *Fábulas Pánicas* (*Panic Fables*), or 'spiritual comics', of Chilean-French filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowsky, post-graffiti, and the history of abstraction, including its repertoire of mystical shapes.

The NGV foyer was the setting for the largest net that Waddi Waddi, Ngarrindjeri and Yorta Yorta master weaver Glenda Nicholls has yet produced. Comprising thousands of hand-woven finger knots, *Miwi Milloo* (*Good spirit of the Murray River*) (2020) was decorated with hundreds of dangling hand-made feather flowers Nicholls crafted in collaboration with her daughter Melinda Andrew. Nicholls draws on the weaving techniques acquired from her ancestors to produce expansive installations that emphasise the pivotal role of Aboriginal women in maintaining cultural practices. Positioned in front of the famous NGV Waterwall, the work communicates Nicholls' intimate knowledge of the waterways, plants and grasses on her

◀ Yann Gerstberger, *Queen Niya Yoruba Corona xxx2*, 2018, cotton, vinyl, 250 x 220 cm. Collection, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. (Purchased with funds donated by Vivien and Graham Knowles; Katrina Knowles and Adam Karras, 2019). (Installation image: Tobias Titz). © Yann Gerstberger

THE SILVERY GREY TONES OF THE LANDSCAPE ALLUDE TO THE PHILOSOPHICAL IDEA OF THE LIGHT OF REASON DAWNING OVER A WORLD REPLETE WITH JUDEO-CHRISTIAN CONCEPTS OF HEAVEN AND EARTH, DEvised BY A DIVINE CREATOR.







▲ Glenda Nicholls, *Miwi Milloo (Good Spirit of the Murray River)*, 2020, detail, cotton, feathers, wire (dimensions variable). Feather flowers made by Glenda Nicholls and Melinda Andrew. Collection, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. (Purchased with funds donated by Lisa Fox, 2020). (Installation image: Inga Walton).

Country. Vicki West, a descendant of the Trawlwoolway people of north-eastern Tasmania, is renowned as the premier Australian practitioner working with kelp. West re-interprets traditional vessels with her work *Reflection* (2020), the nine sculptural forms pay homage to the nine (pre-invasion) nations of Tasmania (lutrawita).

Commissioned by the NGV for the Great Hall, the large-scale, floor-based installation *Recycled woollen island* (2020) is an interactive and utopian resting space by Spanish designer Patricia Urquiola that encourages audiences to pause and reflect during their visit. Her first major project exhibited in Australia, it consists of numerous supersized 'socks', or 'soft giants',

resting on a carpet 'island', and continues Urquiola's investigation into environmental production, recycled textile and artisanal crafts. Using recycled wool felt and upcycled PET textile, Urquiola also produced two accompanying wall hangings in collaboration with the furniture and textile manufacturer GAN.

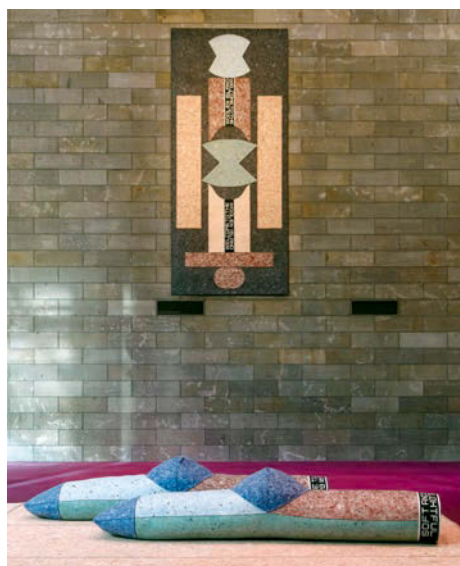
Feminist themes and women's representation underpin Dutch artist Lara Schnitger's practice. She often uses materials traditionally associated with female labour to explore the boundaries of socially accepted femininity, and aspects of this that have long been regarded as taboo. Her immersive installation draws on the representation of women in antiquity. Four central columns, titled *The Squad* (2020),

with their drooping pairs of tights, recall the caryatids of classical temple architecture which use the female body as a structural form. The fabric panels that wrapped around the gallery walls, *House of Heroines* (2020), are reminiscent of ancient Grecian friezes.

Glittering with sequins and plush velvet letters, the works reflect contemporary expressions of women's voice, sexuality and agency with slogans like 'Do not let the boys win', 'Not your honey', 'Don't quit your day dream', 'A dress is not a yes', 'Freak freely', 'You're not Tequila', and 'My other car is a broom'. Figurative imagery of a tampon dangling from a woman's fingers, a mother with four children hanging off her and 'Never alone'



▲ Vicki West, *Reflection*, 2020, detail, bull kelp (*Durvillea potatorum*), bull kelp stems, echidna quills, Tea tree (*Melaleuca alternifolia*), river reed, 46 x 20 x 61 cm; 44 x 10 x 32 cm; 50 x 14 x 54 cm; 41 x 26 x 73 cm; 44 x 15 x 38 cm; 52 x 18 x 59 cm (circumference). Collection, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. (Purchased with funds donated by Nicholas Allen and Helen Nicolay; and donors to the 2020 NGV Annual Appeal). (Image: Sean Fennessy)



▲ Patricia Urquiola Studio, Milan (est. 2011), Patricia Urquiola, designer, *Recycled woollen island (floor rug)*, 2020, detail, felted wool, (a-x) 1450 x 500 x 0.5 cm; *Recycled woollen island (sock sofa)*, 2020, detail, felted wool, 100% recycled PET bands, 100% recycled polyurethane foam, (a-p) 65 x 60 x 360 cm (each); *Recycled woollen island (wall open sock)*, 2020, felted wool, 220 x 500 x 0.5 cm. Collection, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. (Purchased, Joe White Bequest, 2020). (Installation image: Tom Ross).





▲ Detail of Lara Schnitger, *House of Heroines*, 2020, fabric, sequins, timber, wooden stretchers, dimensions variable. Collection of the artist. (Courtesy the artist and Anton Kern Gallery, New York). (Installation image: Inga Walton). ▲ Lara Schnitger, *House of Heroines*, 2020 & *The Squad*, 2020, detail, fabric, sequins, timber, wooden stretchers, dimensions variable. Collection of the artist. (Courtesy the artist and Anton Kern Gallery, New York). (Installation image: Tom Ross).

emblazoned on her underwear, and women in athletic poses reinforce the celebration of the sensual and active female experience.

Jamaican artist Nari Ward's *Last Words of John Brown (red version)* (2018) is from the artist's series of text-based, shoelace installations that investigate how art-making and activism can overlap. The work is composed entirely of shoelaces, installed directly into the wall, that spell out the phrase 'This is a beautiful country'. This was cited as the last utterance of John Brown (1800-59), a white abolitionist who was executed for a failed incitement of a slave rebellion at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, preceding the American Civil War. The ubiquity of the shoelace creates an immediate point of identification for the viewer, and allows the artist to confront social and political issues surrounding race, poverty, and consumer culture. Ward's

use of other discarded material and repurposed objects signals his interest in creating work that is unifying and humanistic at a time of racial division and the BLM movement.

The major new work from South African designer Porky Hefer, *Plastocene- Marine Mutants from a Disposable World* (2020), sprawled over an entire ground-level gallery. The large-scale, handmade, imaginary sea creatures are from a dystopian future he calls the Plastocene. Hefer employed a diverse range of recycled and repurposed materials to underscore his environmental message about the dangerous detritus left in the wake of hyper-consumerism, and convenience. He speculates that in a distant future some species might transmutate, adapting to the endless abundance of plastics and pollutants corrupting the natural world. These enviro-mutants will survive the mass

extinction that Hefer sees the human race so selfishly perpetuating.

Constructed by Southern Guild and a community of artisans based around Cape Town, the largest work, *Buttpuss* (2020), is an octopus made from giant hand-felted cigarette butts, salvaged carpet, and industrial felt. Suspended above it are five other hybrid sea dwellers, each representing a current pollution problem: *Sabre Toothed Netfeesh* (ghost nets), *Sucker Fish* (plastic straws), *Q-Tip* (cotton buds), and *Flat White* (disposable coffee cups). The works are designed as interactive sculptures and can accommodate patrons sitting within them, but this was not possible under the covid restrictions imposed in Victoria during the exhibition period.

The dog-themed children's program *Moja Moja Life* (2020) was the first installation in Australia by Japanese artist Misaki Kawai. The central free-standing sculpture was a substantial work the artist has named 'Arty', covered in neon pink faux fur and based on the Briard breed of large shepherd. There were two other large three-dimensional sculptures: a green rearing dog ('Poofy'), and a shaggy long-haired mutt ('Moja'). Five wall-mounted



◀ Nari Ward, *Last Words of John Brown (red version)*, 2018, shoelaces, 121.9 x 467.4 x 10.2 cm. Collection, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. (Purchased with funds donated by Barry Janes and Paul Cross, 2019). (Installation image: Sean Fennessy). © Nari Ward





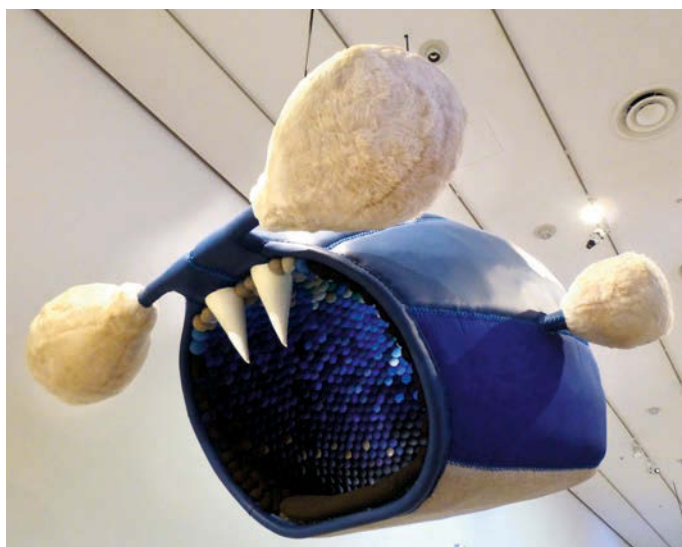
▲ Porky Hefer, *designer*; Southern Guild, Cape Town (est. 2008), *fabricator*, *Buttpus*, 2020, felted karakul wool, industrial felt, canvas, leather, sheepskin, salvaged hand-tufted wool carpet, recycled PEP stuffing, foam, steel, 1512 x 1512 x 328 cm. Frame manufacturer: Streetwires; Felting: Ronel Jordaan Textiles; Sewer & pattern maker: M Clothing; Assembly: Wolf & Maiden Creative Studio; Karakul wool sponsored by Jonay Wool Carding. Collection, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. (Purchased with funds donated by Barry Janes and Paul Cross; Neville and Diana Bertalli, 2020). (Installation image: Tom Ross). © Porky Hefer

works (red, purple, navy, white, orange) incorporated multimedia elements, and displayed a range of contrasting tactile materials. Kawai's concept, which included a puppet-making studio, multiple screens, and a persistent (grating) soundtrack, was designed to encourage children to explore shapes and engage with textures. However, like Hefer's work, the installation was also incredibly problematic with the COVID-19 hygiene protocols in place.

The extent of the deep cleaning required before the *Moja Moja Life* room was fit for patrons was evident when I visited before the Gallery opened for the day; my media escort and I had three attempts to access the space. As arguably Australia's premier public arts institution, the NGV has the staff and resources that allowed it to meet the challenges of the pandemic better than most. The crisis has inflicted unprecedented pressure on commercial and public galleries

alike: with the burden of compliance proving an almost insurmountable logistical and financial expense for some; density limits forcing closures and impacting revenue; artists unable to supervise or participate in person; exhibition schedules constantly under review; and the shift to online content proving a difficult (and costly) pivot for many organisations.

Inga Walton



▲ Porky Hefer, *designer*, *Sabre Toothed Netfeesh*, 2020, basketweave rope, pool noodle, rubber gloves, plastic toy aeroplanes, dog toys, digital print on polyester fabric, foam, steel, 245 x 190 x 135; *Q-Tip*, 2020, recycled advertising banner, leather, off-cut upholstery fabric, sheepskin, salvaged t-shirt cotton, recycled polyester stuffing, salvaged hand-tufted silk carpet, foam, steel, 300 x 220 x 174 cm. Frame manufacturer: Streetwires; Textile production: Mielie; Sewer & pattern maker: M Clothing; Assembly: Wolf & Maiden Creative Studio; Upholstery: Leon at CXIX. Collection, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. (Purchased with funds donated by Barry Janes and Paul Cross; Neville and Diana Bertalli, 2020). (Installation images: Inga Walton). © Porky Hefer



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▲ Denise Lithgow, 2020, *Drought vessels*, 118 x 36 x 36 cm and 113 x 30 x 30 cm, merino wool, wet felted. Photo by Peter Griffen ▲ Denise Lithgow, *Cracked Earth vessel*, 2020, 23 x 30 x 30 cm, merino wool, wet felted. Photo by Peter Griffen ▲ Denise Lithgow, *Earth vessel*, 42 x 34 x 20 cm, merino wool, wet felted. Photo by Peter Griffen.



▲ Denise Lithgow, *Tree Line*, 2020, 75 x 48 cm, hand dyed and assorted recycled fabrics, yarns, machine embroidery. Photo by Peter Griffen.

## Denise Lithgow

### Responding to drought during lockdown.

As a fibre artist and tutor, I am often invited to teach workshops. One place is at Arkaroola, with Arkaroola Art Adventures in the Northern Flinders Ranges of South Australia where my husband, Peter Griffen, and I have been teaching for five years. While travelling from our home in Sydney to Broken Hill and on to Arkaroola, I was struck by the drought-affected regions that we passed through.

With the start of COVID-19 lockdown, all my workshop teaching and exhibitions were postponed. Being isolated in my studio gave me time to create machine embroidery pieces and larger felt sculptures. The images of parched landscapes played on my mind and I was drawn to the symbolism of the drought concept.

My machine embroidery pieces, including *Tree Line*, are a response to the landscape showing the dryness of rocks, hills and trees. To create the machine embroidery works, I combined assorted and dyed fabrics with stitch, using a semi-abstract concept.

To make some of the vessels, I used raw merino fleece which I washed, carded and dyed using native eucalyptus and grevillea leaves; for others, I used commercial dyed wool. I think that the colour achieved in each work is a good response to the landscape in drought also conveying its dryness.

Denise Lithgow, NSW  
[www.deniselithgow.com](http://www.deniselithgow.com)



# BOOK REVIEWS

## Off the Wall: American Art to Wear

Dilys E. Blum (ed).

Philadelphia Museum of Art in association  
with Yale University Press

ISBN: 9780876332917

Published to coincide with the exhibition *Off the Wall: American Art to Wear* at Philadelphia Museum of Art (2019-2020), the book discusses artistic trends and cultural influences that led to the art-to-wear movement. Social activism, unrest and change are a critical part of the history. As Julie Schafler Dale writes in one of the essays: 'These works embodied a harmony of process and vision that looked inward but communicated outward, reflecting a culture in flux, driven by individualism, social awareness, and rebellion'. While the focus is the American art-to-wear movement, the essays clearly show that these developments did not occur in isolation, but reflected synergies, influences and involvement with international links.

The book is edited by Dilys E. Blum, Senior Curator of Costume and Textiles, with essays by Blum and Mary Schoeser, a textile historian and curator who has advised English Heritage, the National Trust, Liberty in London, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. She is the author of several books on textiles including: *Textiles: The Art of Mankind* and *World Textiles: A Concise History*. There is a final essay by Julie Schafler Dale, a gallerist and collector who was also a participant and mentor in the wearable art movement.

Essays by Blum and Schoeser, entitled *collisions, connections, vibrations, articulation, and reverberations*, focus on the period 1967-1997, demonstrating the diverse, interwoven artistic, cultural and social influences that fuelled the movement. The authors discuss links to contemporaneous artistic trends: sculptural textiles by emerging fibre artists; mixed media artists building collages and assemblages incorporating found objects; increasing practices of using the body as a canvas for expressing identity through tattooing, body painting and body jewellery; the use of free-form crochet and knitting for creating sculptural fibre art and fashion that explored feminist and gender issues. Cross-cultural influences were especially strong. Designers and textile artists co-opted patterns, techniques and materials from Asia, the Americas, Africa, and the Pacific, and began dyeing their own fabrics using Asian techniques such as batik, ikat, shibori, and plangi.



In the next phase, designers took inspiration from science fiction and fantasy literature. New materials such as vinyl and acrylic plastic were adopted, while emerging environmental awareness led to the use of recycled materials, embellishing clothing with buttons, buckles, studs, candy wrappers, and video tape. The importance of 'collegiate influences' from new tertiary fibres arts courses are also discussed – and the fact that in the 1980s and 1990s, American universities began closing their textile departments.

In *off the wall: a recollection*, Dale recounts how her interest in fashion as body adornment and desire to find out how contemporary artists expressed themselves through works for the body, led her to visit studios across the country, then open Julie: Artisans' Gallery in New York. From 1973 to 2013, she 'sought and encouraged pieces conceived by and for the artists, not for the commercial public', and so played an influential role in the development of the art-to-wear movement.

The authors also discuss significant exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which marked milestones in the acceptance of textiles and fibre arts, in turn influencing the art to wear movement. Of not, were: *The Art of Assemblage* (MMA, 1961), *Woven Forms* (MCC, 1963), *The Art of Personal Adornment* (MCC, 1965) *Wall Hangings*, (MMA, 1969), *Furs and Feathers* (MCC, 1971), and the Museum of Contemporary Crafts, *The Dyer's Art* (MCC, 1976-77). The book concludes with endnotes, artists' biographies, and a list of selected art-to-wear exhibitions and events.

This book provides an absorbing and illuminating account of the art-to-wear movement, showing it to be more than merely a merging of textiles, fashion and sculpture. It is an important artform in its own right; a form of activism reflecting influences from many cultural and social trend, and countercultures. Readers will find much to inspire as well as a fascinating social history of an underrated artform of contemporary relevance.

**Moirra G. Simpson.**



# Threads: Contemporary Embroidery Art

Charlotte Vannier  
Thames and Hudson

ISBN: 9780500295458

**I**n *Threads: Contemporary Embroidery Art*, Charlotte Vannier, a French designer, copywriter and stylist, presents a survey of international contemporary artists whose use of embroidery demonstrates wide-ranging styles, techniques and subject matter. Vannier selected eighty-two international artists and presents samples of works by each, accompanied by a short text about the artist. The author has written only a two-page introduction and allows the artworks to speak for themselves in fulfilling her aim to show how the featured artists 'have appropriated an ancestral technique handed down through the centuries, a manual craft with a traditionally domestic and feminine bias, and turned it into a wholly contemporary medium free from traditional constraints'.

The vast majority of the artworks illustrated are hand-stitched, including canvas work, cross stitch, kantha, and free, expressive stitching. A few use free machine embroidery on fabric, paper, or on vanishing fabric. The works display technical proficiency, experimental approaches to embroidery as a medium for self-expression, and a high level of graphic skill. Many artists have studied textiles and related subjects at tertiary level and their experience of drawing and painting is evident, while they use stitching artfully to explore conceptual themes.

Zina Katz creates small hand-stitched groups of animated figures in mid-conversation or snapshots of well-known places that act as a record of journeys. Åse Ljones uses repetitive straight stitching and satin stitch to create shimmering surfaces of simple abstract forms. Sylvie Franquet employs cross stitch to reproduce imagery from Old Master paintings by artists such as da Vinci, Ingres, Vermeer and Fragonard, so highlighting and reworking the masculine perspective of the originals. Sue Stone creates stitched studies of people that emphasise the patterns of knitted garments, stone walls, and other textured elements. Virginie Rochetti's work is freely stitched to create the effect of a pencil or charcoal drawing, while Raija Jokinen's embroideries are life studies 'drawn' using hatched lines of embroidery threads that enhance tonal values and create the impression of sculptural form.

Several other artists incorporate stitching into mixed media works: Kaphéne uses collage, paint and embroidery on cardboard, while Sarah Walton stitches life-sized figures into the sides of cardboard boxes. Paul Yore creates densely worked surfaces embellished with stitching, appliqué, buttons, and sequins. Laura Sánchez Filomeno incorporates human hair as an embroidery thread, as its fineness reminds

THIS BOOK IS NOT SIMPLY A SURVEY OF CONTEMPORARY EMBROIDERY; IT IS A SURVEY OF EMBROIDERY AS CONTEMPORARY ART.

her of ink lines. Several artists embroider photographs printed onto paper or fabric to enhance the image or create an intervention that distorts the original image and suggests an alternative meaning.

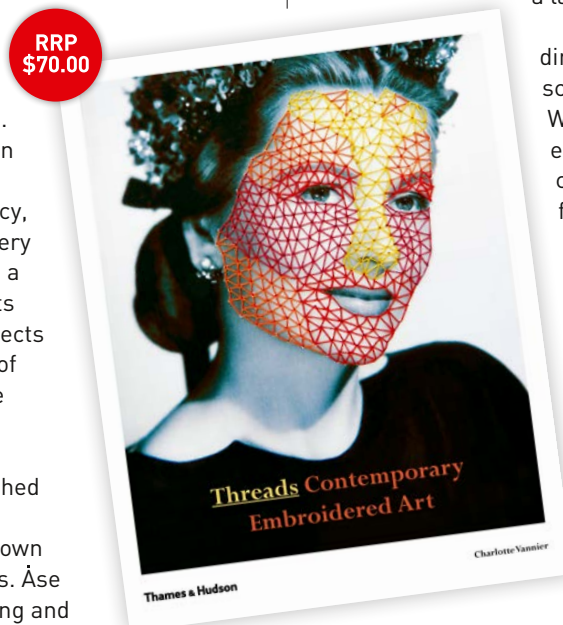
More unusual supports are used by some artists as they explore interactions with everyday objects. Examples by Terézia Krnáčová and Catherine McEver include experiments with stitching onto bread, banknotes and avocado skins, while Sarah Greaves stitched into a banana, wooden doors, a toaster, and yes - even a kitchen sink! Anna Saint Pierre and Christofer Cantodea create large-scale installations by stitching onto fences, bridges, and architectural structures to make embroidery visible to a larger audience.

Some artists work in three dimensions to create stitched sculptures and installations. Meredith Woolnough stitches free-machine embroidery on washaway fabrics, creating delicate sculptural thread forms, like ink-drawn nature studies of skeleton leaves and coral. Amanda McCavour creates large installations of lacey, three-dimensional thread drawings in space. In contrast, Ulla-Stina Wikander stitches over solid objects, such as typewriters and telephones. Sally Hewett has created rather unsettlingly naturalistic forms of stitched, bruised and scarred bellies, breasts and buttocks which draw attention to marks that accrue on bodies over time. Deborah Simon

uses mixed media to construct realistic-looking sculptures of rabbits and bears with faux fur for their coats, embellished in areas that appear to reveal the internal structures of organs and cells.

This book is not simply a survey of contemporary embroidery; it is a survey of embroidery as contemporary art. The diverse works that Vannier has selected for inclusion clearly illustrate the enormous development of embroidery in the hands of artists working with stitch and fabric alone and in combination with other media. It is a book to browse through, to dip in and out of, exploring and enjoying the creativity of these artists. It will be sure to inspire anyone interested in contemporary stitching as an artform. My main criticism of the book is that there is no structure to the text; at the very least, organising the content using the artists' names alphabetically would have assisted the reader in locating a particular artist's name in the text or the index.

**Moirá G. Simpson.**





## Hannah Ryggen: Threads of Defiance

**Marit Paasche**  
**Thames and Hudson**

ISBN: 9780500094099

**T**his is a fascinating biography of Swedish-born Norwegian tapestry artist, Hannah Ryggen (1894-1970) by author Marit Paasche, a Norwegian art historian and curator. It is well-researched and concludes with extensive endnotes, a list of archives, publications and other sources used, and an index.

Ryggen was married to Norwegian painter, Hans Ryggen, and they lived on a small, rural farm on the coast of Norway in a cottage with no running water or electricity, raising cattle and chickens. Ryggen bred her own sheep, produced plant dyes, and worked on a home-made loom, weaving large-format figurative and narrative tapestries using traditional techniques. Stylistically, her early work is somewhat reminiscent of the folk art traditions of Scandinavian tapestries of earlier centuries, but Ryggen was also influenced aesthetically by the works of Francisco de Goya, Pierre Bonnard and Paul Gauguin and, over time, developed a more naturalistic style.

A feminist and a pacifist, active in the Norwegian Communist Party, Ryggen was defiant and uncompromising in her opposition to political and social inequality, power struggles, and autocratic Fascist and Nazi regimes. During the 1930s and 1940s, many of her tapestries depicted political events, oppression, violence, and horrors of war, including the Italian occupation of Ethiopia, the Spanish Civil War, the invasion of Norway by the Nazis, and the Second World War. She wove figurative compositions featuring prominent individuals, such as Haile Selassie, Mussolini, Hitler, Göring, Quisling, and Churchill. She also highlighted persecution of individuals: communist resistance fighter Liselotte Herrmann, who was executed by the Nazis in 1938, and Ryggen's own husband, who was imprisoned by the Nazis in a concentration camp in 1944.

Ryggen continued weaving well into her seventies. In the 1950s and 1960s, her work reflected her opposition to political developments, such as German rearmament, nuclear armament by NATO powers, and the Vietnam War. She also dealt with more positive aspects of the human experience, such as the power of art, our place in the world, mother-daughter relationships, humankind's capacity for love, and drew upon sources from Greek mythology, poetry and art.

During her lifetime, Ryggen's work received some recognition being exhibited in Norway and abroad, including at the New York World's Fair in 1939, a Smithsonian Institute touring exhibition in the USA in the 1950s, and the inclusion of twelve



works at the Venice Biennial in 1964. She also received some major public commissions for large-scale tapestries for the University of Oslo and for a new, prestigious government building. Yet, Ryggen's work is not widely known today and is only now receiving international recognition; since 1912, her tapestries have been displayed in major exhibitions in Germany, Sweden, England, and in a retrospective exhibition in Frankfurt in 2019-2020.

The book includes 122 illustrations, primarily Ryggen's tapestries with some photos of family life, but it is not a glossy, colourful coffee-table book. Instead, it is a fascinating, detailed biography of the life and work of a woman who, despite her impoverished circumstances and remote location, devoted her energies to political activism and critiquing world events. Ryggen's work illustrates the ability of fibre artists to use techniques such as weaving – for so long regarded as craftwork – to produce powerful artworks that perform as political activism and have immense historical significance, so leaving behind an important artistic legacy. This book makes a significant contribution to the history of tapestry and the Fibre Arts Movement of the twentieth century.

**Moir G. Simpson.**

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By Dawn Bordin

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## ALL THAT SPARKLES

Molli Sparkles

### Turning the Corner

As I'm sitting here binding four hundred plus inches of my latest king-sized quilt, my head is swirling with feelings. While it may be July as I write this, like you I'll be reading it in print come December as the holiday season approaches. It's always an unusual experience at publication time reading my thoughts from six months ago. I know these current musings will present an especially poignant perspective since Sydney—and now Melbourne—are in a current state of COVID-related lockdowns. Will we still be locked down come Christmas time, and more importantly will I still be binding this quilt?!

Hopefully, the answer is "absolutely not" to both of those questions, but I didn't expect a lot of things to turn out the way they did this year. For starters, I turned forty (maybe I should have seen that one coming!) It wasn't an altogether frightening experience; however, the hangover certainly was! More than that though, it left me with these feelings of desire and eagerness to make numerous quilts! And not just the quilts, but a renewed interest in other creative pursuits. Suddenly writing that book didn't seem so daunting, nor did launching my own collection of fabrics. Don't even get me started on the contemplation of finishing the myriad number of works-in-progress that I spoke to you about in my last article. Is this a midlife crisis? Because if so, I could have used one of these while at university!

Also not on the bingo card was experiencing the death of my grandfather on the other side of the world with a funeral I could not attend. He raised me from a small child, so in many respects he served as my primary father-figure.



Taking that phone call in the middle of the night—knowing full well it wasn't going to be good—also changed many things in my life. Besides the very real confrontation with death, it also spurred on reflections of familial relationships near and far. Additionally, it provided me with similar thoughts about my artistic journey as my milestone birthday did. "What're you waiting for?" rings louder than it ever did.

Those two things alone happened in the same month, both pushing me to work harder, faster, and stronger. However, as their immediacy waned, it gave me time to reflect on the influence both were continuing to have on my craft. Yes, I had finished seventeen new quilts (started seventeen more), and saw my previously mentioned aspirations as no longer pipe dreams, but achievable goals. What I hadn't stopped to see, though, was if those goals, and really any of my quilty pursuits, were what I still wanted. It suddenly felt like I was running a really fast race that had multiple finish lines, and I still felt like I'd prefer to be sitting on my balcony drinking champagne.

I wanted to say, "Yes, let's do this!" to all of the things. Despite my unwillingness to concede that I'd never be able to cross every finish line, I did realise that at some stage I would need to say "No." Oddly, over the years that had become a dirty word for me, even more odd because I use all of the other dirty words regularly without hesitation! "No, I don't want to do that" was uttered from my lips as I stared at another pile of previously engaging fabric. "No, not that either" as I was flipping through the ideas queued up in my sketchbook. It really slapped me like wet felt across the face: it was okay to say "No." All of the things I thought I should be doing, or had previously felt really engaged to complete, didn't have the same significance.

Here I thought these life changes were giving me magic powers of inspiration to complete every creative challenge I ever had. Instead, these changes caused me to slow down, reflect, and decide it was okay to put pieces of my creativity down for a while. With the increasing use of the word "no," though, has come an increasing interest in a more discerning "yes." I'm discovering that is the key: finding the creative pursuits worthy of my desire and committed intent. Because really, expectations are just premeditated resentments.

Now, I'm not saying I've got my whole world figured out. I certainly don't have your world figured out, in spite of me being able to talk about my own confusion in print. However, I want to share these emotive thoughts with you in case any other artists are feeling like they may also be running that race to nowhere. Who are you trying to beat? Because if like me, you'd rather just be sipping on some champagne, that will always be deserving of a "yes".

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◀ Molli Sparkles, some of the many quilts made and in progress during 2021. Photo by the artist.





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# OLGA CIRONIS

SEE ARTICLE, PAGE 42

*Behind Each Look*, 2007, 260 × 250 × 600 cm, eucalypt branch, woollen blankets and cotton thread.

