

Hands_On

CRAFT IN CONTEMPORARY ART



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4 December 2010 – 30 January 2011
Curated by Cash Brown

Front cover:

Untitled (heart lungs), 2007

knitted human hair, 25 cm x 40 cm x 15 cm

Private collection | Image courtesy the artist, Dominik Mersch Gallery, Sydney and Dianne Tanzer Gallery, Melbourne

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Hands On

For most of us, when we think of art, we think of traditional mediums like painting, sculpture, drawing, photography and print making. In recent decades, video art, installations, ephemeral works, sound works, text works, light works, performance pieces and innumerable combinations of these methods and materials have been added to the mix.

Works of art bear witness to and indeed provide evidence of the circumstances in which artists finds themselves and are a reflection of their preoccupations. The method by which an artwork is made can be equally as important, and is often a reflection of the idea itself.

In this era of rapid technological advancement, ironically an increasing number of artists are electing to engage in modes of production more commonly associated with home crafts, which can be described as methods of making things for the domestic environment with a utilitarian or decorative purpose for which no specialist, tertiary or technical training is required.

Hands On incorporates a rich variety of materials; including recycled plastics, rubber tubing, yarn, human hair, leather, recycled textiles, shredded telephone books, doilies, cane toad skins, handkerchiefs and natural grasses. From knitting and leather craft to tapestry and weaving, an array of unlikely or even denigrated methods are used with great skill, and often wit, to produce works of depth, meaning

and cultural relevance. There is humility in the painstaking and often laborious production of many of these works, resulting in an almost monastic quality. A conceptual depth and rigor is present, minus the flamboyant expressive gestures often associated with painting, drawing and sculpture.

Hands On is conceived as tribute to the richness, variety and the significant underlying concepts of artists who have consistently utilised home crafts in their professional practice. It surveys works from artists whose work has come to my attention over the years from local and regional emerging artists to well known artists with international reputations. While many of these artists also utilise other modes of production such as video, performance and digital media, this exhibition focuses solely on their *Hands On* approach, and their rationale behind doing so.

What drives this type of engagement? Rather than provide a long-winded essay about outmoded art/craft debates and viewpoints, I feel that relying on the intention of the makers and the context of these works provides a sufficient response. Each artist has their own story to tell and the answers to this are as diverse as the works they produce.

Cash Brown
Curator, *Hands On*

Annie Aitken

Cash Brown You have a background in painting but have transformed into a sculptor. Does your training in painting, particularly your relationship with colour, have much bearing on your current practice?

Annie Aitken Training as a painter gave me a great grounding in the use of colour but to be honest I really don't know if it has any bearing on my current practice. I think I have a natural feeling for colour that directs my work.

CB The bag and vessel as a motif, with some reference to Aboriginal women's crafts seems to be a recurring theme in your work – is there a meaning to this in terms of cultural and gender identity?

AA The bag or vessel as a motif came into being after my mother died eight years ago. I wanted to make some work about her life. Her handbag was a treasure trove of personal items, including photographs of all her children. I reversed that idea by using photographs of myself and my siblings and wove them into bags for each of the nine of us as a homage to her. Since then my work has progressed to the ephemeral, delicate pieces that you see now. Also I collect aboriginal woven bags and baskets, which I know has influenced my work, but instead of using grasses and natural fibres, I use stripped out polypropylene thread.

CB Your use of found materials, such as vegetable sacks can be seen as a form of revivication ('To impart new life, energy, or spirit to'). Do you see your work as having an environmental message?

AA I don't see my work as having an environmental message; I simply love the materials I use; they just happen to have been discarded. I get great pleasure by reviving plastic sacks and netting to create something far removed from their original use.

CB When and how did you learn to weave, and how did this practice evolve from paintbrushes and collage?

AA These current pieces are not weaving in the traditional sense. I use a mixture of sewing, weaving and stitching that I taught myself through experimentation. My work is constantly evolving; the materials seem to dictate the work, so I'm happy to just go with it.

Symbiosis #17, 2010
polypropylene, nylon net and stainless steel wire, 100 cm x 27 cm x 27 cm
Image courtesy the artist and James Dorahy Project Space, Sydney



Betty Bird

Cash Brown Do your processes have a meditative quality while you are making work?

Betty Bird I love working with paper and am always experimenting to find different ways to use it. This time manipulating this unlikely material to fashion something usually made of hard wearing fibres – which can be washed and worn again. I like to surprise people, attempting something unexpected, different, ephemeral, striking, and quirky, and preferably larger than life.

I love the softness and feather weight of knitted paper and the soft grey tones, or pastels where the advertisements were. This is not a garment, it is a sculpture. It is lacey, soft, serene – cobweb-like in its suspended fragility. But I can see a practical side: the work is so soft and light, I can imagine a warm bed cover knitted from newspaper, or cosy undergarments. I can imagine struggling homeless people being kitted out with garments knitted from last week's used newspapers, which are composted at week's end and replaced with a new set.

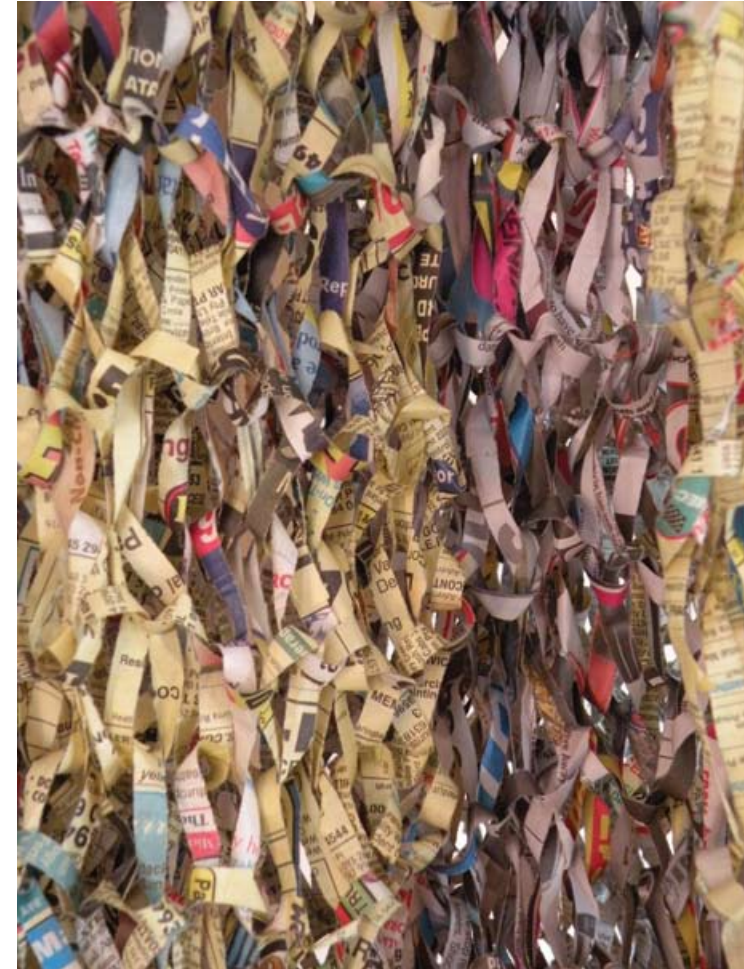
CB Your processes are time consuming and require a great deal of care and dedication. Can you tell me something about your work habits?

BB The work of preparing the paper “yarn” and knitting the garment was extremely labour intensive. This work took many months working mostly for a few hours each evening.

I used white and yellow pages telephone books for the garment and pages from [local newspaper] *The Leader* for the scarves. The paper was shredded and the pieces joined end to end with PVA craft glue to form one continuous strand, which was rolled into a ball. The width of the cut paper is 0.5 cm, and the needles used are size $\frac{3}{4}$ inch. A ball of paper “yarn” was prepared for each knitting session as I needed it.

The paper is quite strong to knit provided I go slowly and keep the tension very loose. Even so there are many breaks, which I repair with the glue as I go. The knitting process, though necessarily slow, is restful and pleasant. It is the initial joining up of the paper strands to form the knitting “yarn”, which is most tedious and boring.

Phone book fashion (detail), 2010
white and yellow pages, glue, 200 cm x 70 cm x 20 cm
Image courtesy the artist



Nicolette Benjamin Black

Cash Brown Your choice of methods and materials is rather unusual, is there an element of environmental concern, personal health, economic or practicality that led you to choose these, or is it more of a conceptual concern?

Nicolette Benjamin Black I am very green conscious so there is a large amount of environmentalism involved in making my cable baskets. All my cables would have been melted down to reclaim the copper with no thought of the pollution derived from the burning of the plastic coating. All of my cables are donated to me from friends from their workplaces or homes. I love the strength and colour that the cables have – some are delicate and fine and others are strong and hearty – this dictates the form that the basket will take.

CB Where and when did you discover the expressive qualities of your medium and how did you learn the skills required to make the work?

NBB I learnt basket making when I did a textiles and weaving certificate at Yass TAFE in the early 1980s. I became interested in the cables as a fibre for weaving about three years ago. They responded well to the traditional basket weaving techniques that I have learnt and echo contemporary ATSI basket making.

CB Do your processes have a meditative quality while you are making your work?

NBB All the processes I use have a meditative quality to them. Repetition of movement, the circling of the cable, the wondering about the colours used, all stimulates a deep meditative contentment which is deeply restful.

CB You recycle and reinvent domestic detritus, does the material come first and then the idea, or do you seek out the materials and methods to suit the concept?

NBB I have been involved in several 'Making Do' exhibitions with the Wagga Wagga and Goulburn Regional Galleries. 'Making Do' was an early concept for the country dweller who had no shops nearby and had to re-use and recycle all their materials. We now think of that as a third world concept. It has political overtones now, as well as beauty to be passed on to the viewer. I start with the political concept and end up with an artwork.



Black power plug presentation bowl, 2009
computer cable, coloured copper wire, 25 cm high x 30 cm diameter
Images courtesy the artist

Patricia Casey

Cash Brown Your method of production is not usually taught at art school, what got you started on it?

Patricia Casey I began working with embroidery in an earlier body of work (*Slippage*) and I think it began as an act of rebellion. I was doing my Research Masters and I was so sick of the documentary focus in the photography department that I absconded from there and did my own thing. It just seemed like a perfectly natural progression. Also my father and mother-in-law were dying of cancer at the time and this kind of work was portable – I could do it at the hospital etc. and it was very calming.

CB Where and when did you discover the expressive qualities of your medium and how did you learn the skills required to make the work?

PC I was taught to embroider and crochet as a child – I’m in my late forties and girls were taught craft when I was at school. My mother and an elderly neighbour also taught me, so it was also about passing on knowledge and spending time with female role models.

CB Your processes are time consuming and require a great deal of care and dedication. Can you tell me something about your work habits?

PC I am very disciplined when I am working on a project and will spend time in the studio almost every day. I research my subject matter and usually do some reading and drawing before I get started. As I am interested in using

different types of materials, I go through a period of testing before I settle on my basic materials. Because of the repetitive nature of the work, I have to be careful of overstrain injury, so I will work in specific blocks of time. I often do an hour or two in the evening also with the family around me.

CB You combine digital photography/printing with crochet and knitting, which is a seemingly opposing medium and contrasts with the oft held perception that craft based practices are a rejection of the synthetic world. Can you explain the relationship between these elements of your practice?

PC Photography is intrinsically linked with memory and nostalgia, yet is in itself an unreliable medium. My work questions the veracity of photography as an aid to memory and also draws attention to the fragile, slippery nature of memory itself. Often my photographs are out of focus or have been manipulated. I will pick out specific details with embroidery. In the crochet works, the threads appear to be unraveling; or are in a shape that reminds one of an antimacassar or a doily. There is a certain incongruity between the photograph and the craft elements – I am saying “this is not real – this is a memory token”.



Dialogue with a dream 3a, 2010
photograph, metallic thread,
cotton thread, wallpaper, pins, 70 cm x 44 cm



Dialogue with a dream 1, 2010
photograph, metallic thread, cotton thread,
wallpaper, pins, 70 cm x 44 cm



Dialogue with a dream 4, 2010
photograph, metallic thread,
cotton thread, wallpaper, pins, 70 cm x 44 cm

Images courtesy the artist and NG Gallery, Sydney

Bridie Connell

Cash Brown Where and when did you discover the expressive qualities of your medium and how did you learn the skills required to make the work?

Bridie Connell I grew up in an artistic home and it was always understood that I would attend art school however the patriarchal painting department I found myself in never really suited me. Turning to my mother's collection of 1970s craft journals and embroidery magazines for inspiration, I began to teach myself various home craft techniques and adapt them to satisfy my conceptual concerns.

CB You recycle and reinvent domestic objects, does the material come first and then the idea, or do you seek out the materials and methods to suit the concept?

BC I'm attracted to the awkward beauty of everyday objects and situations and my work combines personal and fictional narratives with a good dose of dark humour, to explore representations of women and femininity in art and popular culture. Often this is expressed through the subversive and nostalgic use of maternally inherited objects and 'women's crafts.'

Hanky Panky Fiction is a series of personalised 1950s and vintage handkerchiefs hand embroidered with the titles and tag lines from men's adventure novels (pulp fiction publications) from the same era. The series is a playful investigation of female stereotypes and role-play in fantasy and in reality, contrasting the 1950s housewife with the pulp fiction bombshell – ideals which have been popularised by both genders for their 'retro' sex appeal – through the embellishment of delicately pretty, yet functional objects designed to get dirty.

Hanky Panky Fiction, 2010
vintage handkerchief, cotton, embroidery, 26 cm x 26 cm
Image courtesy the artist and Arterreal Gallery, Sydney



Jedda-Daisy Culley

Cash Brown You recycle and reinvent domestic detritus, does the material come first and then the idea, or do you seek out the materials and methods to suit the concept?

Jedda-Daisy Culley At first I felt liberated by the approach of my artistic training, where the concept came before considering the method or materials. For example when I wanted to explore a society that I believe is characterised by a significant absence of community, tradition and shared meaning, I made a woven banner, referencing advertising culture, with an absurd proposition 'peace in the universe'. I had never woven anything before this work. Recently I have become frustrated with this totally concept-centric way of working. After working with weaving and knitting for the last two years I have established more of a dialogue between materials and ideas. Endless knitted legs with tiny pink penises become a staple of my work because knitting on the couch after dinner, when the studio is too cold, is acceptable.

CB Why do you think an increasing number of artists are putting down their paintbrushes and taking up methods more traditionally associated with home craft?

JDC My last example of couch knitting shows how integrated I think art and life are. A lot of artistic mediums and pursuits have been co-opted by commercial parts of society. Things like painting can appear exclusive whereas crafting techniques are accessible and exist at the core of all cultures the world over. I like the idea of being linked to these ancient traditions and find it a more natural way to comment on today. But at the same time I feel a lot of responsibility to uphold the principles in my work. About living sustainably, because of the mediums I use. When you know the sheep your fleece is coming from, dye it, spin it yourself there is nothing abstract about it, you feel your own impact on the natural world.

Peace in the universe, 2009
hemp and merino with twine, 100 cm x 150 cm
Image courtesy the artist



Adrienne Daig

Cash Brown Is there an element of environmental concern, personal health, economic or practicality that led you to choose your materials and methods, or is it more of a conceptual concern?

Adrienne Daig My methods and materials are chosen for environmental, health, economic and aesthetic reasons. I predominantly use scraps and recycled fabrics. I like being able to reuse materials, for the obvious environmental reasons but also because I think they look good. I had chosen sewing as a medium before I developed chemical sensitivities, for me working with paint and other toxic mediums is completely off limits so it was fortunate that I was already working with friendly materials!

CB Your method of production is not usually taught at art school, what got you started on it?

AD I taught myself embroidery from a book. I learned basic sewing at school, also my grandmother was a very good dressmaker and knitter and I picked up her sensibility. I like the intricacy of the work and the hands-on quality. I find small details greatly add to the work's interest. I am very fussy. I like everything to be well made and for there to be fine points to engage the viewer. My work, both with embroidery or machine sewing, is quite meticulous. I want to achieve a certain finish and surface complexity. I want my work to look beautiful, well made and to revive past skills and for

the 'craft' to be of a high standard. Materials like tea towels, fabric scraps and old clothes, I can also draw on past traditions of the homemaker and of domestic industry. In the past people had to use materials that came to hand, fabrics were recycled and the imagery was often autobiographical and or local. Today most craft is an industry. I'm thinking about activities like quilting and cross-stitch; it is all very homogenised, pattern book stuff, much of the originality and inventiveness of the past is lost. Using these older traditions and working methods adds an ambiguity to my work that hopefully challenges distinctions between craft and art.

CB Your work is a series of self portraits, are they a reflection of how you see yourself as a woman in the Australian domestic landscape, or how others may see you?

AD Superimposing my self-portrait across the image on the tea towel can create a clumsy picture. The two elements are an uneasy fit. The choice of materials and the 'anti-style' techniques of appliqué embroidery worked onto the kitsch imagery of the tea towels creates a kind of patchwork image, which I think accentuates the humour and also makes obvious the fictional nature of portraiture.

Skipping with Kangaroos (detail), 2009
appliqué and embroidery on linen, 78 cm x 47 cm
Image courtesy the artist | Artwork photography: Robynne Hayward



Leah Emery

Leah Emery My practice is currently preoccupied with the interaction of subject and medium that appear to be in opposition; namely hard core pornography and cross stitching. The forcible interaction of these themes produces an intriguing study from which I have developed a series of work. This work is involved in transfiguration as I introduce explicit images of pornography to the craft of domestic cross stitch. The resulting effect is a conflict between the beauty of the woven colours, patterns and texture and vulgar imagery that is not the usual fare of such a craft. I aim to dampen the shock impact of the explicit content of the images by imbuing their curious vulgarity with a beauty that the image alone can't attain.

Cash Brown Your processes are time consuming and require a great deal of care and dedication. Can you tell me something about your work habits?

LE Partially out of obsession and partially out of necessity, I am compelled to devote any spare second to my practice. This seen me bringing my work along to social occasions and stitching with a bottle or two of wine at BBQs, on public transport, on flights, on holiday and even at exhibition openings!

CB Do you outsource some of your work, if so to whom and why?

LE I have been very staunch in my decision to refrain from even contemplating the possibility of outsourcing up to this point. Each of my works take a minimum of 50 hours; more often 100+ hours to complete, and it's often been suggested that I would benefit from enlisting some retired embroidery enthusiasts to help speed up the process. I find that my sense of accomplishment upon completion is heightened and I can claim complete ownership of each laborious enterprise.

The Exhibition 3, 2008
cross stitch, 11 cm x 14 cm

Private Collection | Image courtesy the artist and Bruce Heiser Gallery, Brisbane



Kirsten Fredericks

Cash Brown Is there an element of environmental concern, personal health, economic issues or is it a matter of practicality that led you to knit sculptures or are they borne from a more conceptual concern?

Kirsten Fredericks Choosing to use wool for my materials is practical for me as I have an obsession with collecting wool, knitting, texture and colour, (I have to do something with the hundreds of balls of wool in my house). I use the wool to conceptually express a feminine side to the penis.

CB Your method of production is not usually taught at art school, what got you started on it?

KF Watching my mother sit in front of the fire on cold wintery nights knitting jumpers for my father. I wanted to be part of the process.

CB Where and when did you discover the expressive qualities of your medium and how did you learn the skills required to make the work?

KF I learnt to knit at an early age. In the past twelve years I have worked along side fashion designers and other artists learning how to create individual showpieces be it knitted couture or soft sculpture. I was taught to crochet by one very passionate, skilled, older woman.

CB Do your processes have a meditative quality while you are making these pieces?

KF Absolutely! I have subconsciously learnt to count from six to thirty over and over and over.

CB How does the content of your work match the form?

KF I would say it's a non-traditional match using a feminine craft to humorously 'soften' the penis.

CB Your processes are time consuming and require a great deal of care and dedication. Can you tell me something about your work habits?

KF Whenever I can I pick up my knitting and create. I will do a couple of hours in the day (every day) and then stay up late knitting on the couch into the early hours of the morning.

CB Why do you think an increasing number of artists are putting down their paintbrushes and taking up methods more traditionally associated with home craft?

KF For me it's a love of nostalgia for keeping alive the skills of past generations and applying this to a modern context.

CB Do you outsource some of your work, if so to whom and why?

KF I have an army of 'granny knitters' that I sometime outsource my work to. I usually do this when I have a lot of projects on. Everyone has their own individual style of knitting and I like combining my work with theirs.



Zippy, 2010
lambs wool, 27 cm x 9 cm x 16 cm



Coctus, 2010
cashmere, 40 cm x 21 cm x 17 cm



Chernoball, 2010
French angora wool, 29 cm x 10 cm x 25 cm

Images courtesy the artist

Cecilia Fogelberg

Cash Brown Your choice of methods and materials is unusual, is there an element of environmental concern, personal health, economic or practicality that led you to choose these, or is it more of a conceptual concern? Your method of production is not usually taught at art school, what got you started on it?

Where and when did you discover the expressive qualities of your medium and how did you learn the skills required to make the work?

Cecilia Fogelberg I started to sew during my first year in Australia. I was broke and I had nothing else than what I was wearing and my suitcase. I could not afford to buy artist materials but as I had a constant need to create I started to use what I had and what was affordable. I already had a small sewing kit in my suitcase and my first sculpture in Australia was made out of an old t-shirt and toilet paper.

When I later became a student at VCA, I was still poor and I continued to sew. I had at this point discovered that I could buy cheap fabrics and old clothing at op-shops. If I needed a red fabric, I simply looked for a red \$2 t-shirt in the op-shops. During my op-shop searches I also once found 100 meters of different colored fabric for \$24 – and I am still, until this day, using this particular batch of fabrics in my sculptures.

Apart from the cheap aspects of using op-shop recycled materials, I also found it very satisfying to use materials that already had had a different life. That the materials I used had had a function for another person and that they now would find new life in my work. To use recycled materials also felt good out of an environmental perspective; that my work did not add to the creation of more materials, and possibly more waste in the world.

The fact is that I still, in a traditional meaning, can't sew. I failed sewing (and English) at high school. I sometimes wondered if my early life's failures, is a paradox of my life today. I have however during the years developed a technique that allows me to make my sculptures. I have learned how the material reacts and what I need to do to shape it into my creatures. At times the material also contribute to the final look as it's a constant give and take between my original idea and what the material allows me to do. Sometimes the materials also take me down a road that I did not know existed.

Rockers in my backyard: Mick Harvey, 2008
recycled fabric, wire, cotton thread, sequins, beads, pins, wool
30 cm x 30 cm x 20 cm
Image courtesy the artist



Minka Gillian

Cash Brown Your choice of methods and materials is rather unorthodox for a contemporary artist, is there an element of environmental concern, personal health, economic or practicality that led you to choose these, or is it more of a conceptual concern?

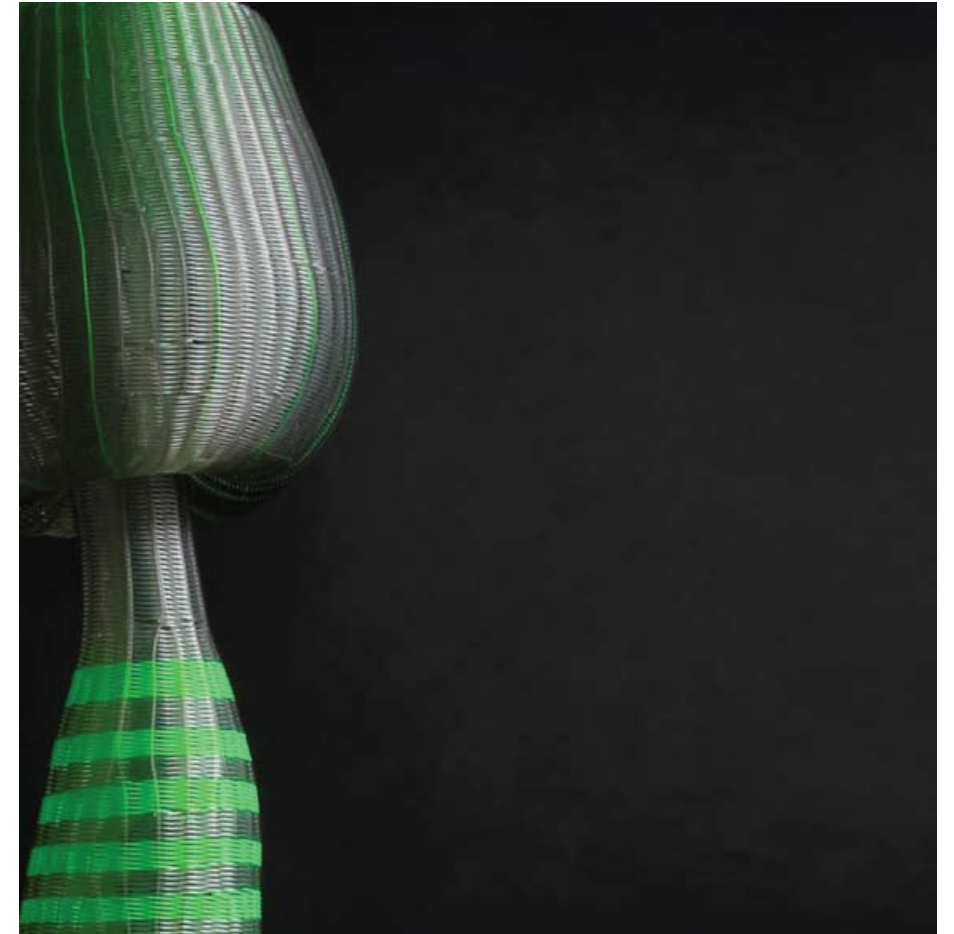
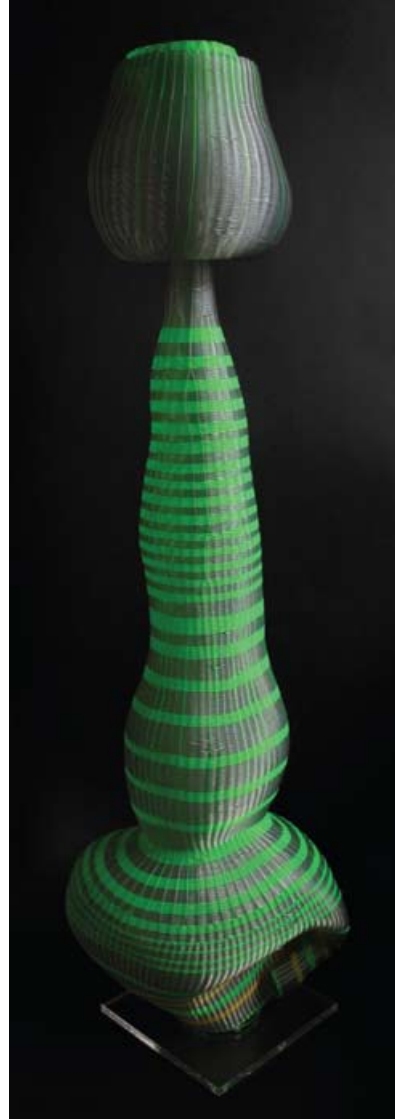
Minka Gillian Growing up my mother had very serious allergies to almost everything. Therefore I lived in a house without plastics or new products that could give off harmful chemical gasses, so viewed plastic as toxic and repellant. Using natural and second hand material was then a very obvious choice for me coupled with the poverty of being a student. The last two years of Uni brought many changes in my life a major one being the improvement of my mother's health, many of her allergies disappeared after the treatment of an undiagnosed illness, plastics were no longer such a taboo and I felt less tied down by the past. My attraction to used objects was partially the history that I feel is imbued in them and this adds richness to my work.

I introduced fishing line into my work to get a glass like quality. The transparency of the material enables me to explore more complicated internal forms while allowing these forms to layer over each other and still be read from the outside. The less forgiving nature of synthetic material has also challenged me to focus on the technique and form.

CB Where and when did you discover the expressive qualities of your medium and how did you learn the skills required to make the work?

MG I was slow to see the potential for weaving as an artistic medium, partly because of the snobbery I felt towards basketry as an art form. It took until my third year of Uni to realise I could incorporate weaving into my work. At the beginning I was caught up in the intricacy of weaving and made small, precious objects as my skill and confidence grew so did my work. However I am often frustrated by the slowness and limitations of my art form but am too reluctant to relinquish any control over the outcome to outsource any of my work at the moment. This may become a necessity as my work grows in size and complexity.

Striped Green (and detail), 2010
polyester mono filament and Perspex stand, 107 cm x 26 cm x 28 cm
Image courtesy the artist



Michelle Hamer

Cash Brown Does your process have a meditative quality while you are making these works?

Michelle Hamer Being hand-stitched tapestry my work very much has a meditative quality to it. The repetition of stitches within the rigid plastic grid dictates a high level of both sameness and concentration. These elements force me to become immersed in the work, patient and relaxed. Through creating many consistent variables the differences in yarn, size and contemporary edicts become more apparent and important. This mirrors the subtleties of interstitial spaces and the signage that the work explores conceptually. The repetition allows me to reveal moments within 'the everyday'.

Working with a defined grid also means that there are no shortcuts. I need to keep working until the piece is done, accept errors as part of the process and embrace each piece as a meditative time investment from which to learn and grow as an artist.

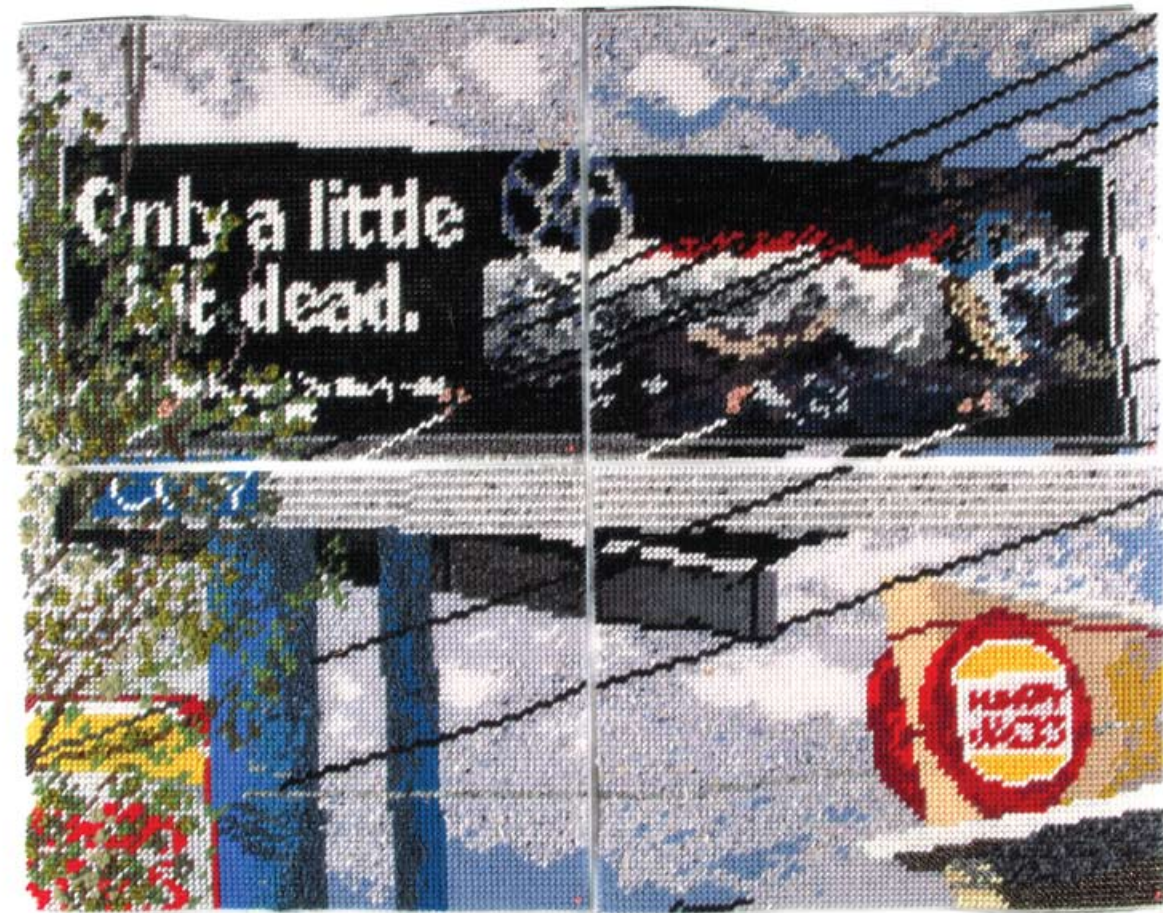
CB Why do you think an increasing number of artists are putting down their paintbrushes and taking up methods more traditionally associated with home craft?

MH Employing 'home craft' techniques was an option to me as an artist because it was something I had always known/grown up with. It is a physical memory I have in my hands even though I was never formally taught any of

these skills. When creating through craft the artisan has a tangible connection with their work. I am a tactile person and even when drawing, painting or photographing I want to alter or mould things with my hands. It is an extension of self that I believe artists have always engaged with.

Tapestrying allows me to actively be a part of each pixel, each part of the image. I become part of the motion of the work while feeling and touching each strand of yarn. My hands and eyes contact each part of the process and as a creator this is crucial to me. In an increasingly digitised world I think people often crave the manual and physical connection that craft offers.

Only a little bit dead, 2008
hand-stitched tapestry on perforated plastic, 53 cm x 68 cm
Image courtesy the artist | Artwork photography: Marc Morel



Newell Harry

Cash Brown Your choice of methods and materials is rather unorthodox for a contemporary artist, is there an element of environmental concern, personal health, economic or practicality that led you to choose these, or is it more of a conceptual or cultural concern?

Newell Harry Well, I'm not sure my methods or materials are that unorthodox for a so-called 'contemporary artist'. But if I had to categorise what I'm into, generally, I'd say it's more conceptually driven, couched perhaps in a kind of 'neo-primitivism'. But I loathe tags and boxes so let's leave it at that. Like most us, what I do is often determined by contextual, spatial, as well as financial limitations. So the modes of working and choice of materials emerge as a strategy to deal with that. Like anyone else, my circumstances are changing all the time – it's the nature of living isn't it? – so it'd be rather dumb of me not to adapt and/or respond to contextual shifts as they occur. That said, I've often viewed travel as being my real medium. The state of being in between, outside, or indeed being 'the outsider', culturally and ethnically as a racial minority, is something I accept and work from both here and abroad. Any discovery of new materials or working methods simply emerges from that nexus. I guess it's about encounters, intersections and contact with people and places outside the familiar or 'local'. I'm very much someone who likes to be in and of the world, traveling and moving about. This is opposed to the linearity of being stuck in a room resolving aesthetic problems to simply put on display in another room every twelve months or so.

Indeed it's hard for me not to think of anything more self-limiting than being tied to a singular place, mode of working, or worse, some kind of stylistic straightjacket that that one continues to yawn over day in day out. In that sense, what I do is never preoccupied with any one particular medium, cultural, conceptual or historical standpoint, but many. And I'm more intrigued by what artists bring into their studios rather than what goes out.

CB Your method of production is not usually taught at art school, what got you started on it?

NH Well, again, I'm not certain I actually have a particular 'method of production', but many, and, as I've said, it changes circumstantially. Though at heart my taste is fairly conventional rather than 'contemporary' and lies in a fondness for tradition. As a collector of 'tribal' artifacts from Africa and Oceania as well as Folk and 'Naïve' painting, what gets my pulse racing mightn't be that revered in Australian art schools these days; it's not mainstream. When I started traveling through the South Pacific, it occurred to me that was happening there was far more engaging than anything going on in urban Australia.

Untitled, 2008
canvas, wire, ink, miniature doilies (Preeti Lieberman), 220 cm × 97 cm × 40 cm
Private collection | Image courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney



Catherine Hearse

Cash Brown Your method of production is not usually taught at art school, what got you started on it?

Catherine Hearse Crochet seems to be the most versatile of all textile production techniques as it starts at a single point and can be taken in any direction from there. It is therefore perfect for making three dimensional objects. Crochet is also extremely portable and works well for the penurious itinerant artist moving continuously from one rental property to the next.

Problem solving processes in crochet lead me to continually develop and refine my technique making work interesting and challenging.

CB Your choice of methods and materials is rather unusual, is there an element of environmental concern, personal health, economic or practicality that led you to choose these, or is it more of a conceptual concern?

CH I started making collage and sculpture with textile elements while at art school as I'd developed the skills from an early age and it seemed natural to use already acquired methods rather than wrestling my way through new techniques. I could then concentrate my energies on content and form and begin to develop my own style.

CB Do you outsource some of your work, if so to whom and why?

CH I've never outsourced my work as it is quite immediate, although slow, and problems are solved as pieces develop as there is no pattern for an original work.

Bulbous Red and Blue Flower, 2008
crochet cotton, found wood & glass beads, 33 cm x 12 cm x 9 cm
Image courtesy the artist



alan jones

Cash Brown Sewing and stitching soft sculptures has become an integral part of your practice, alongside painting, how has this happened?

Alan Jones I always try and have a couple of different mediums on the go at once. Whether it be paintings and soft sculptures or soft sculptures and drawings or drawings and paintings... whatever it is, it doesn't really matter. It's more about having the ability and freedom to switch materials and mindset at will. I find if I work this way it keeps me interested in the work and hopefully the work is interesting.

CB Your motifs and expression with the sculptural works has a very similar feel to your paintings in terms of the figurative elements, i.e. they are clearly your handwriting, and predominantly figurative and portraits, so why choose the three-dimensional form over two?

AJ I usually try and keep the work within some form of self-imposed boundaries. This is why you'll find the work typically fits within just the one or maybe two different themes. However, switching between 2D and 3D within the boundaries keeps things exciting for me. 3D is a completely different way of using my hands. This in turn forces me to think a little differently about what it is I'm doing. More often than not, that's a good thing.

CB Recycled materials seem to play an integral role in your sculptural works, is this an environmental message or merely a pragmatic and inexpensive way of producing work?

AJ I started using recycled fabrics firstly as a more cost effective alternative to the more conventional or traditional 'fine art' materials. Then as things progressed, I really began to enjoy the relationship between the history of the actual fabric and the subject of the work. Most of the fabrics I work with are worn pre-loved cloths. A lot are my own hand-me-downs from family and from friends.

CB Are the portability and installation possibilities of your sculptural work part of the appeal as you can place the characters in different environments and thus alter viewer's perceptions?

AJ The idea of incorporating relevant environments into the process of making soft sculptures has certainly made thing interesting – it becomes a whole new element. Working on locations has put me in some tight situations. However, viewing the subject in their environment adds a layer of relevant information that can only be achieved by the subject being placed in that particular location.

Todd, 2010
mixed media, 180 cm x 100 cm x 100 cm
Image courtesy the artist and Watters Gallery, Sydney



Narelle Jubelin and Barbara Campbell

Refer to Source 1 & 2 are a kind of loose testimony to many years of intimate conversations somehow temporarily made public... as ever to be read within our respective practices while simply citing our primary references... where each part supports the other...

— **Narelle Jubelin** to **Barbara Campbell** email 13/09/10

I think there's something about the domestic scale of these conversations and practices that allows for a certain kind of work (much like "the craft traditions" Cash is focusing on). And mostly, for both of us, our homes have been our studios. I do a lot of thinking in the shower or on the couch staring at my books; not reading them, just staring at them.

— BC to N| email 13/09/10

From about 1985 when we lived in adjacent Darlinghurst blocks, the view from our respective picture windows was literally each other: I would read while Narelle sewed. At times I would drop in and read to her while she sewed. Now we're on opposite sides of the world, these conversations more often take the form of Skype or images and emails sent in electronic call and response.

On Narelle's visit to Sydney last year we exchanged gifts. I gave her a screenprinted *News Haiku* t-shirt and she gave me the delicate gold/ecru sewing on mesh in *Refer to Source 1*. It was so almost not there that for a long time I found it hard to place it amongst my other objects. Finally, I found the

spot, floating in front of the source work for my *1001 nights* cast project and with side-lighting to bring out the texture of the sewing.

I photographed the placement and sent it to Narelle. I already knew that Narelle's image source was one of the Marimekko hand towels she has in her home in Madrid (a towel I've used as a guest). But its scale affords many playful readings — as a large painted abstraction, for instance, or an oddly displaced fringed carpet.

When we started talking (loosely, casually) about something for *Hands On*, Narelle extended the image/source relationship and made a complementary work with two further duo-tone sewings, this time supporting one of her own critical reference works – a pink bi-lingual extract from Joyce's *Ulysses*.

Barbara Campbell
Sydney, 15 Sept 2010



Narelle Jubelin and Barbara Campbell, *Refer to Source 1*, 2009-2010, 7 parts

Part 1: Narelle Jubelin, *Marimekko towel (gold/ecru)*, 2009

cotton on cotton mesh, acrylic, 5 cm x 11 cm x 3 cm

Parts 2-7: *The Arabian Nights*, 6 Vols, London, The Folio Society, 2003
25. 4 cm x 31.7 cm x 19 cm

collection of Barbara Campbell | Image courtesy the artists and Mori Gallery, Sydney

Artwork photography: Barbara Campbell



Narelle Jubelin, *Refer to Source 2*, 2010, 3 parts

Part 1: Narelle Jubelin, *Marimekko towel (pink/orange)*, 2010

cotton on cotton mesh, acrylic, 9 cm x 9 cm x 3 cm

Part 2: *James Joyce, Penelope, Das letzte Kapitel des Ulysses*, English/Deutsch, Frankfurt

am Main: edition Suhrkamp, 1975, 17.6 cm x 10.7 cm x 1 cm

Part 3: Narelle Jubelin, *Marimekko towel (pink/magenta)*, 2010
cotton on cotton mesh, acrylic, 9 cm x 9 cm x 3 cm

collection of Narelle Jubelin | Image courtesy the artists and Mori Gallery, Sydney

Artwork photography: Barbara Campbell

Adrienne Kneebone

Cash Brown Your method of production is not usually taught at art school, what got you started on it?

Adrienne Kneebone I moved to the Territory in 1995 and was entranced by the pandanus plants, the red earth, the semi-tropical climate and the warm windy nights. I was hungry to learn how to connect with it and collecting, processing and weaving with pandanus – even the smell of it – satisfies that desire.

CB Do your processes have a meditative quality while you are making the works?

AK The process of twining with pandanus is as laborious as it gets however I have found while constructing resolved forms through weaving the chaos in my mind can reach a similar resolve. Initially weaving was a way of making myself busy on the road while my boyfriend fixed the car! Teaching myself weaving definitely filled a void for me as an 18 year old.

CB Your work uses some methods and materials used by Aboriginal Australians, how did your practice come to adopt these methodologies?

AK There was a collective group of hippies living in the Territory scrub working with indigenous women weavers when I arrived in 1995. It was through watching what they had learnt that I fell in love with the techniques, colours and processes used traditionally. Now I work extensively with indigenous women weavers developing their fibre works and creating avenues for their work to be exhibited and promoted! It has been an interesting exchange!

Town'n'Kantri, 2009
pandanus, pet collar letters, 40 cm x 30 cm x 28 cm
Image courtesy the artist



Alice Lang

Cash Brown How does the content of your work match the form?

Alice Lang My practice investigates possibilities for sewn sculpture to explore and complicate the relationships between concepts of the decorative and the grotesque; particularly their associations with depictions of femininity. Hundreds of individual forms are sewn together in an intuitive manner, allowing the materials to drive the formation of the work to grow organically. This creates a hybrid object/organism whose final form references both foreign and familiar bodily elements and creates tension between the familiar and the unknown. It is this tension between form and formlessness, and allure and repulsion that is central to my practice.

CB You also work in video which is a seemingly opposing medium and contrasts with the oft held perception that craft based practices are a rejection of the synthetic world. Can you explain the relationship between these elements of your practice?

AL I am interested in exploring the relationship between sculpture and the body through the creation of wearable pieces that integrate and interact with the subject as performative objects. Video is a medium that I employ to document this performative element of my practice. I am interested in how this direct interaction when documented through video is able to reinvent the work in a context other than installation. I have had issues in the past with the loss of detail that occurs when the work is translated through video. This is a tension that is ongoing in my practice.

CB Your method of production is not usually taught at art school, what got you started on it?

AL Craft has always been a common link between the women in my family. My mother taught me to sew as her mother taught her and I used to make ceramics with my grandmother when I was a little girl. Craft was a medium through which we could relate and connect with each other. I began to incorporate craft and sewing techniques into my art practice during the 2nd year of art school. This felt like a natural medium to employ within my practice as my understanding of constructing objects developed from my knowledge of craft.

CB Do your processes have a meditative quality while you are making the work?

AL There is a meditative quality to the mindless act of sewing the same shape over and over. Recent studies have shown repetitive actions carried out in crafts such as knitting release alpha waves similar to that experienced during meditation. There is satisfaction in the simple act of making.

Auropod (detail), 2010
recycled sweaters, wadding, yarn, 180 cm x 120 cm x 100 cm
Image courtesy the artist



Rodney Love

Cash Brown You frequently use human hair in your work, can you explain the significance of this and where you source the material from?

Rodney Love I started using hair when I was making sculptural works with wire. I was stuffing things into the wire shapes, as well as putting things on the outside. I don't recall how or why, but hair seemed like something that would work stuffed inside. I went to a hairdresser and asked for their leftover hair sweepings. Soon I was visiting a dozen hairdressers to collect their hair. When I later explored different art/craft techniques – making paper, weaving, embroidery – I realised that hair could be used in so many different and useful ways.

So, the use of the material came first, but the conceptual concerns soon followed. Hair has so many connotations and associations, across all cultures, so the titles of my work started to address disparate concerns like religion, humanity, fairy tales, the Holocaust, and just the fact of being human amongst other humans. Early projects dealt mainly with the idea of the group, and the hair was a metaphor for anonymous people. Later work dealt more with individuals, and at that stage I started to collect hair from identifiable people, rather than anonymous hair salon patrons.

CB Do you outsource some of your work, if so to whom and why?

RL No, but the non-creative, grunt work like spinning the hair into a yarn I would gladly farm out to someone if I had the money to do so, and found someone who could do it to my specifications. It would free up time for the actual planning and weaving of work.

CB Where and when did you discover the expressive qualities of your medium and how did you learn the skills required to make the work?

RL I started at art school in the Sculpture department, but took classes in different areas – textiles, ceramics, papermaking – to learn as much as possible. The first textile class I took introduced me to a range of techniques, and weaving really appealed to me. I took further classes, and extended my knowledge, finding that similar conceptual concerns to my sculptural work could be expressed through this medium. As I was using the idea of the individual and the group in a lot of my work, the idea of the “fabric of society” was a natural fit.



The Devil's Cloth, 2008-2010
human hair, cotton, twill weave, woven on 4-shaft table loom, 16 cm x 16 cm
Image courtesy the artist | Artwork photography: Adrian Cook

Dani Marti

Cash Brown Your choice of methods and materials is rather unorthodox for a contemporary artist, is there an element of environmental concern, personal health, economic or practicality that led you to choose these, or is it more of a conceptual concern?

Dani Marti Only a conceptual concern. My artistic process is driven by the symbology of everyday industrial materials, craft practices, conceptualism and formalism; creating dynamic woven constructions and sculptural installations that combine intellect and a sensual, Baroque minimalism. These works have a strong inflection of portraiture and resemble 'swatches' of fabric which capture personalities, moods and intensities. As such, they recall the intimacy of fabric in contact with the body and represent not only states of feelings but also regimes of class and power and the idiosyncrasies of personal psychosexualities.

CB You also work in video which is a seemingly opposing medium and contrasts with the oft held perception that craft based practices are a rejection of the synthetic world. Can you explain the relationship between these elements of your practice?

DM My practice is stimulated by what I perceive as challenges within the act of portrayal. I am fascinated by what lies behind the surface of the subject as an essence to be grasped or sought after through attempting to re-present it. The dialectic between the possibility and simultaneous hopelessness of this endeavour emerges in the abstraction of large-scale woven works, and

videos that borrow from the language of documentary. The formal polarity that exists between these ways of working is the terrain on which I am able to examine how in approaching the physical and mediated surface of information, alternate readings may be generated by the viewer.

CB Do your processes have a meditative quality while you are making the work?

DM While making the work I create a strong intimate relationship with the person I am trying to represent. There is a performative aspect to the work that gets extended onto my video work.

CB How does the content of your work match the form?

DM An individual, and my experience of him/her would be the starting point for me to choose a particular pattern, rope, pace, size...

CB Your processes are time consuming and require a great deal of care and dedication. Can you tell me something about your work habits?

DM It goes from seconds of ecstasy to hours of torture. It is a very meditative way of working and sometimes my 'monkey' mind fights the restrictions imposed on itself.

Braveheart, take 4 (detail), 2008
polyester, polypropylene, nylon and leather on wood, 143 cm x 200 cm x 13 cm
Image courtesy the artist, BREENSPACE, Sydney and Arc One Gallery, Melbourne
Artwork photography: Jamie North



Timothy Moore

Cash Brown Do your processes have a meditative quality while you are making these works?

Timothy Moore Generally no. One would think that the medium would have, but after sitting in the same semi hunched position for hours a day my neck and shoulders are pretty fucked. I try to stay as relaxed as I can but I'm normally sewing to a deadline [that's when I'm at my most productive] and I get pretty tense, luckily there's a great massage place down the road from my studio.

Because they're so portable I do sometimes take them to the beach or the park and try to work in a different environment, this is normally quite non-productive, I usually end up having a nap instead. So really, I just sit in my studio, which I'm lucky to have in my back garden, with my head down, shoulders hunched and eyes straining for quite a lot of hours a day but I love it. I always embroider the outline first then fill in the block colours, this is very laborious, I liken it to the slowest colouring in book in the world. I'd like it if it were meditative, or at least I think I would, I've never actually meditated.

CB Your processes are time consuming and require a great deal of care and dedication. Can you tell me something about your work habits?

TM My day always starts with a cup of Scottish breakfast tea and an hour long walk with my dog Peggy-Mittens, and a swim in the warmer months.

Having the studio in the back garden has its pros and cons. I try to structure my day as a normal working day, say from eight through to noon, lunch, forty winks, then half one through to four. This isn't always the case as I find it hard not to do housework or bake a cake or potter around the garden.

When working towards a show I like to source all my images before I start drawing, whence I'm happy with the amount and variety of images, I'll doctor them in various ways, then I like to draw them all up on the linen, normally with a super fine 0.02 coloured ink, then after I'm happy with all of the drawings I'll embroider them from start to finish one at a time. When I'm happy with them, I take them across the road to Jo at Silver Moon laundromat and he presses them for me.

On the occasions that I haven't put in enough hours during the day, I make sure I churn out a few hours nocturnally. I find the late nights to be really productive, and can work easily through to two in the morning, but this fucks up the following morning, as I like to be up by six, walking the dog. I get really focused when I know there is a deadline. It's kind of an all or nothing vibe for me. I lay off the booze, and just sew, sew, sew.

Made Up Fish 4, 2010
Embroidery on hand-woven vintage Sicilian linen, 30 cm x 30 cm framed
Image courtesy the artist, Helen Gory Galerie, Melbourne and Chalk Horse, Sydney



Sarah Nolan

Cash Brown Is there an element of environmental concern, personal health, economic or practicality that led you to choose these, or is it more of a conceptual concern?

Sarah Nolan Probably personal, economic and practical concerns played a role in how I came to work with fabric and thread. I inherited my initial collection of fabrics when my mother passed away, and have since purchased bargains from op shops, remnants from fabric shops here and overseas and a variety of other sources, all involving little cost. I occasionally spend up big and purchase vintage fabrics or fabrics that I just can't resist. I really enjoy working with what I have been given or find rather than searching for what I think I need. I'm an impatient painter so I think working in fabric is suited to my temperament as I can loosely assemble all the elements together and see what the work might be before I actually begin to stitch. When I first started sewing it was also a practical solution to making work as I had limited space, it was either the dining room table or lounge. The works have since evolved so that I am more concerned with the ideas and how I express them using the methods I have developed.

CB Your method of production is not usually taught at art school, what got you started on it?

SN I inherited lengths of fabric, a sewing box and machine when my mother passed away in 2000. As a means of doing something positive with my grieving I started to make things from these items. The first being a cushion

cover with a statement my mother said when she was ill, "I'm coming back", in fabric letters. This method of expressing myself eventually influenced the way I produced and continue to work. I also incorporate other methods such as stenciling and have recently made a work that involved stitching on to a 245gsm paper that was then coloured with chalk pastel.

CB Where and when did you discover the expressive qualities of your medium and how did you learn the skills required to make the work?

SN I originally trained as a graphic designer before the rise of computers, the training and experience I gained, where it was a hands on approach to both material and composition, have been influential to my current process, where the initial stages are similar to creating a 'graphic' mock-up. Through arranging the elements and layers in a 'loose' state I can begin to see what the work could be almost instantly. This tactility and immediacy of the material is one of the reasons I enjoy working with fabric, and thread, and where the element of 'chance' and 'accident' occur in the construction phase. The nature of the fabric selection and the composition informs everything down to the type of stitching that I use, being either formal and orderly in a purely functional way or illustrative and experimental so as to achieve a visual quality of depth, detail and visual balance.



AVERAGE, 2009
fabrics, beads and cotton thread
51 cm x 25 cm

PRETTY GOOD, 2009
fabrics, beads, sequins and polyester thread
51 cm x 25 cm

VERY GOOD, 2009
fabrics, beads and polyester thread
51 cm x 25 cm

Images courtesy the artist

Jessica Emily Price

Cash Brown Why do you think an increasing number of artists are putting down their paintbrushes and taking up methods more traditionally associated with home craft?

Jessica Emily Price Each medium carries its own meaning visually and historically. Particular aesthetics and modalities have their rise in art – performance, space-based practice, video – at times when they have a certain synergy with contemporary thought. In a frenetically paced, increasingly digitised and distanced world perhaps there is something in the immediacy and meditative nature of craftwork which is beginning to once again hold resonance.

CB Where and when did you discover the expressive qualities of your medium and how did you learn the skills required to make the work?

JEP My both of my grandmothers and my mother are avid fiber crafts women (knitting, sewing, crochet) and I spent a lot of time as a child making things with them.

CB How does the content of your work match the form?

JEP My work investigates feminine identity. It's about how we understand ourselves as women today in light of the history of patriarchy, feminism, the sexual revolution, the digital revolution and the rise of raunch culture. For me these elements underpin our consciousness, shape the way we think

and influence the relationships we have with each other and ourselves. Using a traditional women's handicraft is more than a way of simply referring to this history, it is about uncovering the meaning this practice holds for women. For me birds are also very feminine. I find their fallen bodies very arresting. Strong and fragile, hopeful and pathetic. Striving for something yet falling just short.

CB You combine digital video works with stitched pieces too, which are seemingly opposing medium and contrast with the oft held perception that craft based practices are a rejection of the synthetic world. Can you explain the relationship between these elements of your practice?

JEP I believe the two mediums need each other; bring tension to each other. They unite the disparate elements that inform our sense of self as 'post feminist' women. Crafts practices may be seen as a rejection of the synthetic world, but they exist with it.

I think this holds particular meaning for Gen X women who grapple with the transition from second wave feminism to the soft porn aesthetic of the digital era. This push-pull of conflicting ideologies and versions of self can be fracturing, leaving us wondering where we fit, who we are and how we feel about it.

Not as I Do – Gull II, 2009
Embroidery cotton on Calico, 45 cm x 75 cm
Image courtesy the artist and MARS, Melbourne



Helen Pynor

Cash Brown A number of your works are made from human hair, what is the relevance of this and where do you find it?

Helen Pynor I made my first work from human hair many years ago and more recently my knitted hair sculptures, made from knitted single strands of hair tied end to end to end. I enjoy hair both tactilely, for its delicacy and paradoxical strength, and conceptually, for its ambiguous in-between status. Hair hovers somewhere between nature and culture, living and dead, beautiful and repulsive. My hair sculptures are also ambiguous, being there and not there, repulsively visceral but spectral almost to the point of implausibility. Hair has strong links to history and time, each strand recording the events in its owner's life – diet, stresses, emotional states – at cellular and biological levels.

When I first worked with felting hair some years ago I collected it in weekly rounds from all of the hairdressers within walking distance of my home at the time in Surry Hills. The result was masses of hair of all colours and textures. For the knitted works I needed long lengths of very high quality hair, which I sourced from a hair dealer in London as I was living in Europe at the time. He supplies hair to wig makers and theatre companies and sources his hair from women all over the world, but the hair I bought came from Spanish women. Despite the anonymity of the donors I find myself wondering from time to time about the lives of the women who spent so many years growing the hairs I knit.

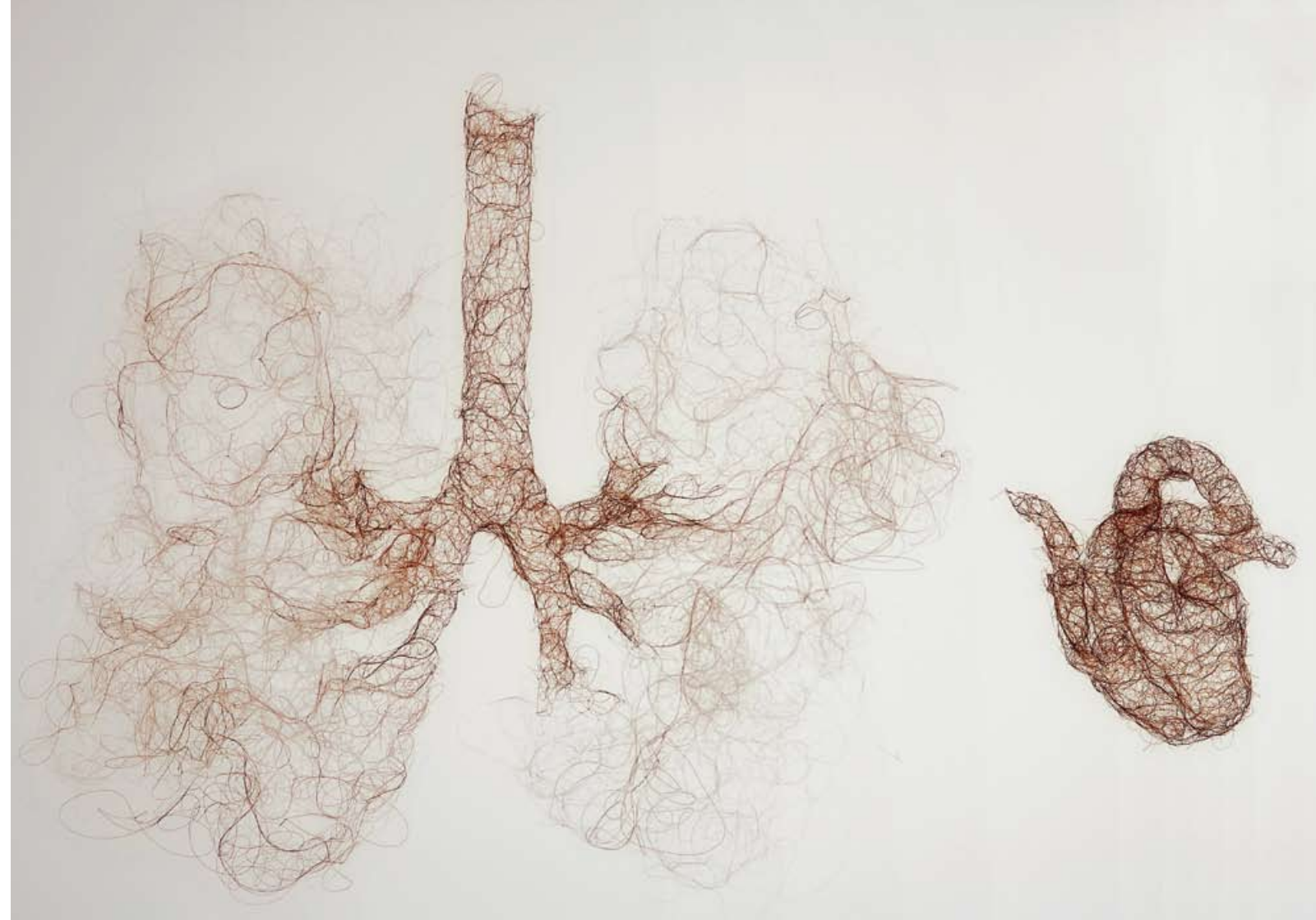
These questions tie in to my interests in the spoken and unspoken transmission of memory, and the fragmentation and decay of memory over time. Whilst the knitted works sometimes portray a melancholy associated with a lost past, I'm also interested in how the imprints of memory shape personal and social experience today and into the future. On another level, by using human hair to create hidden and secret internal biological structures, I render the hair "out of place". The displaced hair becomes a vehicle for upturning received categories such as inside-outside and visible-invisible.

CB Your processes are time consuming and require a great deal of care and dedication. Can you tell me something about your work habits?

HP The process of knitting single strands of hair together is demanding and becomes a very accurate gauge of my state of mind at any given time. At its best it's a kind of moving meditation and is very calming to my mind. But if my mind is agitated, I inevitably end up in a hair tangle at some point. Hair has a habit of becoming very disobedient when I become wilful with it, but it becomes magically cooperative when I work with it.

Untitled (heart lungs), 2007
knitted human hair, 25 cm x 40 cm x 15 cm
Private collection

Image courtesy the artist, Dominik Mersch Gallery, Sydney and Dianne Tanzer Gallery, Melbourne



Silke Raetz

Cash Brown Your recent works are a reflection of your RSVP dating experiences, a kind of autobiographical celebration, can you explain this?

Silke Raetz “Mayflower” was my on-line dating name; in cyberspace real names were never used. As part of the RSVP process it was compulsory for each on-line dater to complete the same set of questions. These questions were akin to ‘filling out your own advertisement’. The section I found most amusing was the question ‘what am I not looking for in a man?’ To me the answer was clear; I certainly knew the types of men I did not want to date. So, with good humour the first part of the series evolved.

The second part depicts a few of the dates “Mayflower” attended, with men who responded to her ‘advertisement.’ Each man had his own on-line name but as means of summing up the experience and their individual characters I gave them another name with tongue-in-cheek reference to the “Mr. Men” children’s books.

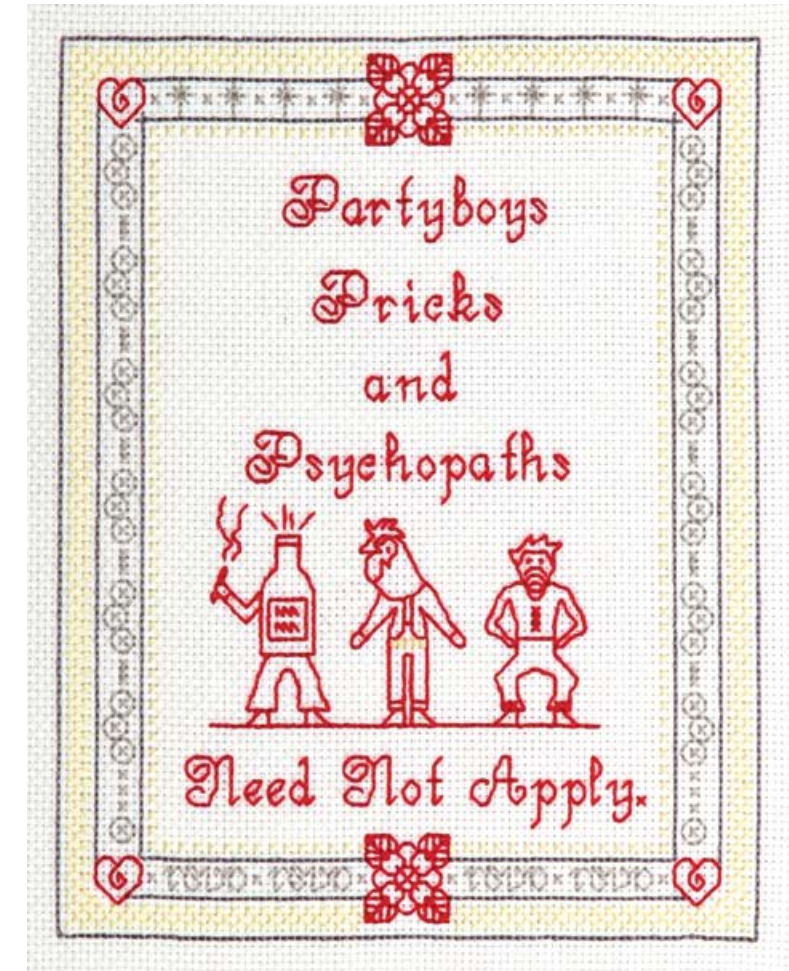
Ultimately, however, the “Mayflower” series is a love story. As fate would have it I met my husband-to-be on RSVP. This was quite sincerely the most unlikely thing I might have expected.

And so yes, this series is ‘a kind of autobiographical celebration’ because in life, you just never know what might happen next.

CB How does the content of your work match the form?

SR In my practice I like to begin with the idea, the concept, I then consider the best way to execute this concept. When I started working in this traditional medium it was the history that connected with me. Previous generations of women produced samplers similar to these for their glory boxes or for their family homes. Their purpose was to reinforce a sense of ‘Home Sweet Home’, of domestic bliss. It made me think ‘what would a woman today stitch about, what would I stitch?’ and the answer seemed so far removed from that of previous generations- my life was simply nowhere near their family ideal. And so I began to recognise the potential to subvert the very notion of these needlepoint pieces, to play unexpected games with something that holds a conservative history. As a result I could tap into the contradictions between the controlled form of the sampler and the confronting and chaotic nature of modern woman’s reality, of my reality.

Partyboys (Mayflower Series), 2010
cross-stitch fabric with cottons, 21 cm x 17 cm
Image courtesy the artist and Michael Reid at Elizabeth Bay, Sydney



Linelle Stepto

Cash Brown You recycle and reinvent domestic objects, does the material come first and then the idea, or do you seek out the materials and methods to suit the concept?

Linelle Stepto In my work the conceptual concerns come first, I then select the materials that best support that concept. There is a danger of being seduced by the materiality if the artist tries to make the concept fit the material... the work will be thwarted. I have never felt the quality of the material or the skill with which it is manipulated is quite enough, on its own, to warrant being classed as a work of fine art.

CB Your method of production is not usually taught at art school, what got you started on it?

LS I wanted to make work about the hypocritical position I myself inhabited (wildlife carer, environmental awareness, yet still driving a car). We manage to justify our positions into an uneasy marriage... so I wanted to make a wedding dress and veil out of road-kill. This led me to collect and skin wallabies and possums from the rural roads I travel on, and to learn how to skin the animals and prepare the skins using salt. A friend had been subjected to this process as a small child (hunting, male bonding etc) so he explained it to me, I taught myself... it is a ghastly undertaking, but I felt it was part of my process for making for the work... it gave the result more integrity. I now procure my skins elsewhere as time and practical considerations intervene. The cane toad skins were particularly difficult to process, and the results were nowhere near

as beautiful as the specimens I now get. The finer the skin, the easier it is to manipulate into the forms I want.

CB Do your processes have a meditative quality while you are making the work?

LS The process of making the replicant flowers is really meditative and enjoyable. I am always intrigued by how it will look when complete. That keeps me going. The process of skinning is ghastly at the outset and then repetitive and strenuous... the animals without skin look really forlorn.

CB Why do you think an increasing number of artists are putting down their paintbrushes and taking up methods more traditionally associated with home craft?

LS Art needs to reflect the culture from which it springs. Traditional means of making art may not be varied and complex enough to express or reflect our varied and complex society. Perhaps the taking up of craft materials & methods is part of the ongoing exploration of the boundaries of art which began with the Enlightenment.

Say it with flowers, 2010
cane toad skin, kangaroo fur, wire, 70 cm x 70 cm x 40 cm
Image courtesy the artist



Anton Veenstra

Cash Brown Why do you think an increasing number of artists are putting down their paintbrushes and taking up methods more traditionally associated with home craft?

Anton Veenstra I see the gestures that many painters deliver as “facile”; undeliberated, self-congratulatory, indefensible. I prize a Zen-like state of mind where a weight of deliberation is loaded onto a gesture; having said that, I admit there is a meditative flow to the process, and some gestures are anticipated, others seem to generate themselves.

CB Your method of production is not usually taught at art school, what got you started on it?

AV At a Diploma of Education summer camp on the bank of the Hawkesbury River in 1977 someone was demonstrating weaving as a primary school activity. Mine was a visceral reaction: I realised I had an affinity to this craft, it was in my DNA, in my cultural memory bank [my mother’s folk embroideries, khelim rugs]. Intertwined with this was the awareness that this medium was capable of conveying image and story at least as powerfully as poetry, which I was writing at the time. The arts in the 1970s were complex, obscure, experimental, for me somehow unsatisfactory, unfocussed; compared to which, making an object seemed very attractive: it bypassed verbal modes to deliver an immediate visual/ tactile impact.

CB Do your processes have a meditative quality?

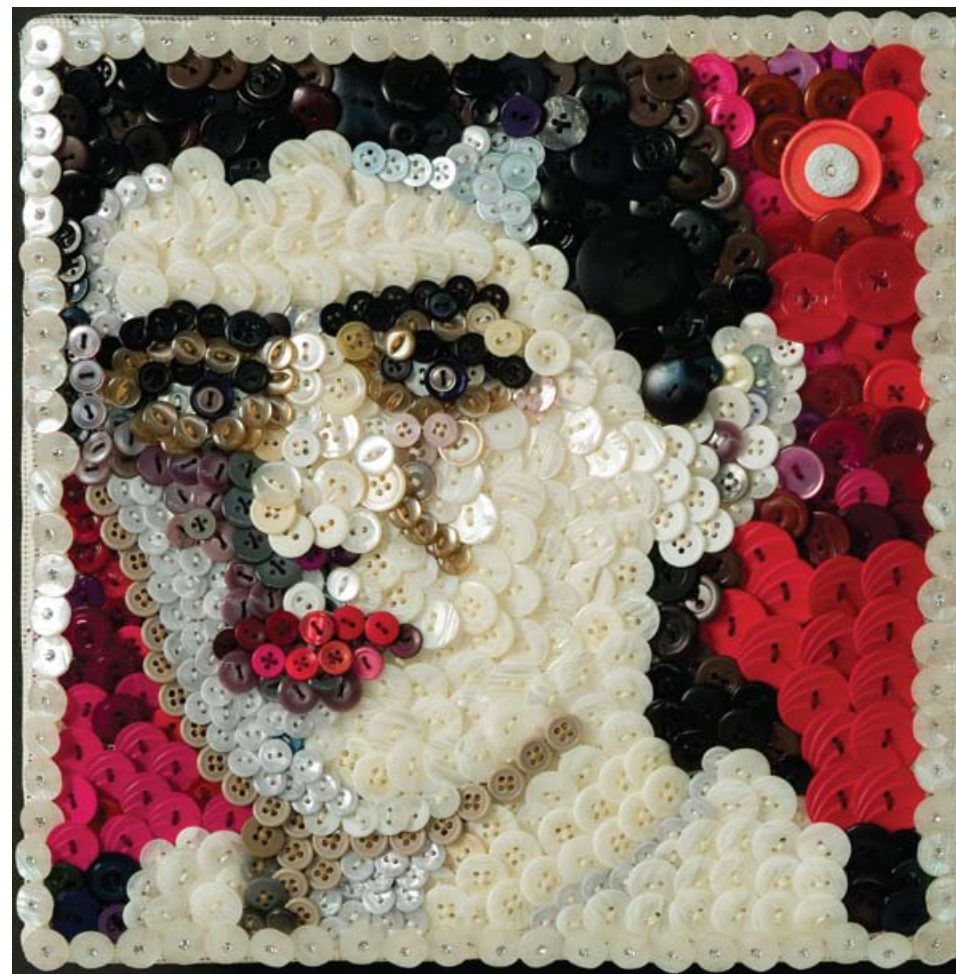
AV Sometimes weaving is like travelling on a river, or it’s like flight; that’s the zone.

Before a project is started the loom seems like a swimming pool, about to be filled with colour. When my creative process flows, colours happen like after-images on the retina.

CB How does the content of your work match the form?

AV There is not a separation of idea and medium: sometimes a project will require a lot of sketches before the weaving begins; sometimes these sketches work to unblock an area that is difficult; my most successful pieces involved a strongly visualised image, that had a level of challenge; yet sometimes over-planning at first can lead to a feeling that the source of inspiration has run dry.

Internat Refugee Org., 2004
assembly of art deco buttons, 30 cm x 30 cm
Image courtesy the artist



Ingrid Wimbury

Cash Brown Is there an element of environmental concern, personal health, economic or practicality that led you to choose these, or is it more of a conceptual concern? Also, your method of production is not usually taught at art school, what got you started?

Ingrid Wimbury Re-cycled woollen blankets which are dyed using sustainable indigenous plant materials form the basis for my textile work. As a migrant who settled in a small regional traditional sheep area I became aware of the amazing qualities of wool, a traditional way of life and industry which until this point hadn't been part of my experience. Making friends with "women on the land" and witnessing their dedication and reliance on it changed the way I worked. In an attempt to bond and appreciate the "foreign" Australian landscape – colours and plants – I started dying cloth using plant materials – mainly eucalypts. Brewing pots of old wool & silk – all protein based fibres which take dye well – on open fires provided me with a wonderful way to bond and feel earthed in a new country. I discovered a subtle richness in the colour. I became absorbed in noticing the way these plant colours were so closely linked to the seasons and particularly sensitive to dry and wet periods. Harsh drought, seasons with fierce fires and recent floods have become a central concept that I work with and are reflected in the colour and stitching and layering of fabric. I love using natural plant dyes, without the harmful chemicals which many artists seem to become increasingly sensitive to. Safe disposal of dyes and their natural tannins which make them relatively colourfast are another attraction, as is their

easy availability. There is a great sense of authenticity and fulfilment in gathering one's own plant materials and it has led me to feel a real sense of place although a flash of brighter colour is still visible in the commercially dyed threads I stitch with and this reflects connections that will always remain to the bold intensity of my African past.

CB Where and when did you discover the expressive qualities of your medium and how did you learn the skills required to make the work?

IW I have attended several wonderful master classes with Glenys Mann who has been a great source of inspiration, knowledge and laughter. She and the other band of equally passionate women who have worked together in January heat waves without air conditioning, in old shearing quarters on a remote property have led me to explore textiles in an unconventional way. Having the courage to stitch in a simple naive style, based on running stitches and often incorporating the raw and worn frayed edges of re-cycled fabrics has meant rejecting the learned sophisticated rather superficial style of embroidery that is part of my western heritage. This challenges both the artist and the viewer to see the stitching as mark-making in the same light as marks made in expressive drawings.

Liminal Rituals #2 (detail), 2010
recycled fabrics, wool, silk, natural dyes and stains, 75 cm x 60 cm
Image courtesy the artist and Anita Traverso Gallery, Melbourne



Hands On: Craft in Contemporary Art

Hazelhurst Regional Gallery & Arts Centre

4 December 2010 – 30 January 2011

Curated by Cash Brown

Artists: Annie Aitken, Betty Bird, Nicolette Benjamin Black, Patricia Casey, Bridie Connell, Jedda-Daisy Culley, Adrienne Doig, Leah Emery, Kirsten Fredericks, Cecilia Fogelberg, Minka Gillian, Michelle Hamer, Newell Harry, Catherine Hearse, Alan Jones, Narelle Jubelin & Barbara Campbell, Adrienne Kneebone, Alice Lang, Rodney Love, Dani Marti, Timothy Moore, Sarah Nolan, Jessica Emily Price, Helen Pynor, Silke Raetze, Linelle Stepto, Anton Veenstra, Ingrid Wimbury.

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Open daily 10 – 5 pm

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