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On the Making

The power of objects, the act of 'making' and their capacity for facilitating agency in the lives of women

An exegesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Caroline McQuarrie

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Grandma's Quilt, Caroline McQuarrie

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Groundwork for Action¹

An introduction

¹ All chapter titles are taken from *McCall's Sewing in Colour*, 1963.

Virginia Woolf talks about the loose, drifting material of life, describing how she would like to see it sorted and coalesced into a mold transparent enough to reflect the light of our life and yet aloof as a work of art. (Schapiro and Meyer, 1978, p.151)

When I was a child, my family lived three hours drive from any of my relatives, so my parents made us an extended family from their friends. Within this family, my 'grandparents' were Frank and Daphne. Frank was a photographer, and Daphne was a painter, poet and potter. Daphne taught me to draw and paint, and would talk to me about artists that she loved. When I went to art school, I felt as though I was not just going for myself, but for her as well. Five years ago, while I was living in the UK, and only six weeks before I would be home in New Zealand for a holiday, Daphne died from breast and bone cancer. I was devastated, I didn't get a chance to say goodbye, or go to her funeral.

In the months after her death, when my mother helped go through and divide up her things, she asked the family if she could keep some items for me, which they agreed to. Mostly I got her clothes; I have five of Daphne's shirts, which I wear regularly. Every time I wear one I am taken back into her life and into our lives together, and I feel a strong connection to her. I am aware that she once wore this same piece of cloth, and I imagine her here with me again. These objects are loaded with meaning, and because of this they are some of my most precious possessions.

Central to my thesis is the following of threads of connection that run between people, and how these threads can be worked into objects through a process of making. My family are prolific makers, I joke that during my childhood I tried every craft there is. My research this year has centred on the question 'How does the act of making facilitate agency in the lives of women?' arising largely from the history in my family of women using sewing and related crafts as their means of expression. Much of my thesis has circled around defining exactly what these practices are and what they mean to me as an artist; a good deal of my research has gone into methods and ways of working. I am also concerned with how my practice fits into my life and how my life feeds back into the practice. I have investigated 'thinking through making', the idea that the act of making is itself a way to think through the work, and I believe this can also be traced back to making passed down through the generations.

My own interest in sewing has mostly been in making clothing, so I have investigated the use of clothing in art, and especially where that clothing signifies the human body. From there I became interested in the implications of the body represented being female. I will discuss the history of Western cultural inscriptions on the female body, through the writings of theorist

Marina Warner. Central to that discussion will be her idea that owing to our particular cultural history in Western society, the female body has long been accepted as an 'empty canvas' onto which meaning can be put. The use of clothing in art as a signifier of the body is especially relevant to this idea as clothing can be used as the vehicle for that meaning, and I will read the work of three contemporary artists, Caroline Broadhead, Anne Ferran and Lesley Mitchison, through the theoretical concerns outlined.

My parent's house is littered with objects made by my sister and I for my parents on special occasions - awkwardly shaped photo frames or pieces of pottery with "Happy Mothers Day Mum!" glazed on the side. These objects have not been kept all these years for their aesthetic value, and I hardly remember making them. They mean something to our parents even if they embarrass us, demonstrating that sometimes objects can evoke a relationship for only one person, when the other person is barely aware of the object's existence. My practice this year eventuated in the creation of objects that celebrate my relationship with six women who are presently absent from my life. These works are not about each person, or even a balanced look at our relationship, they are about my attempts to evoke a connection I feel with an absent other. These attempts are based on subjective memory, how much of what I recall is actually real and how much mere invention or sentimentality is hard to define.

The final part of my research has focused on biography and autobiography that is expressed through object making. I explore autobiographical methods that do not necessarily require a factual basis. I am interested in how creating my own story can facilitate agency, rather than being tied down to a story I might already have. I see my practice as autobiographical, but I do not feel compelled to adhere to 'facts' from my life. In this respect, (re)creating our own stories from the past permits us to also be creative with our future.

A Perfect Pattern

The use of clothing in contemporary art

Scarlett O'Hara tore up the olive velvet draperies to (make a dress to) woo the man and save her plantation. (Hawkes, 1998, p.236)

Clothing is a complex signifier of all the meanings culturally applied to bodies. Its use in art can reference, among other things, ideological values, economic status, group affiliation (Bachmann and Scheuing, 1998, p. 17), fantasy, memory, gender, sexuality and history (Baert, 1998, p. 75). Clothing is a way we identify ourselves to others - both as like and unlike them. Clothing is literally a second skin, it protects and shields us. It is at once public, and yet private, and when we present it without the body that would usually inhabit it, we emphasise that dichotomy. Artist Ruth Scheuing illustrates this:

Clothing deals effectively with the intimate and private, speaking directly of the way we hide underneath these layers of fabric. By focusing on the apparent irrelevant (clothing), the relevant (body) is able to relax, able to reveal itself. (Scheuing, as cited in Felshin, 1993, p.54)

In the Modernist period, clothing came to be used as a subject or medium in art. A number of Modernist movements, especially in Europe, saw clothing as a highly visible way to illustrate their ideas². Clothing began to be used in art as a substitute or surrogate for the body around the middle of the twentieth century; work made in this way was forerunning the practice that would become more common in postmodern art. Jim Dine made work that used items of clothing representing the body; among others his 1959 *Green Suit*, and 1961 *Palette (Self Portrait No. 1)* used real items of clothing, a suit and a bathrobe, which Dine then painted. These items stand in for not only the body, but also the canvas.

Perhaps the most famous work of 'clothing' art of this type is Joseph Beuys' 1970 *Felt Suit* (fig. 1). A story is told of Beuys in the Second World War "being rescued by Tartars and wrapped in felt and fat to keep warm" (Turner, 2001, p.1). *Felt Suit* is a work about clothing as armour, albeit a humble, fabric armour. This is an important work for me because it is an autobiographical work that speaks of Beuys' feelings towards the strangers who saved his

² Italian Futurists used the clothed body as a site for radical politics, by printing manifestos directly onto clothing, and wearing outfits of loud colour and design, like Balla's *Anti-neutral Suit* (1914) which was a bright suit made up in the red, green and white of the Italian flag. They also brought attention to their ideas about the modern body through works that mechanised the movements of the wearer (Baert, 1998, p.76). Russian Suprematists and Constructivists used traditional textile producers, peasant women, to embroider their fabrics and garments with Modernist designs around the same time as the communist revolution, sparking at the same time a renewed interest in traditionally designed embroideries and garments (Douglas, 1995). In Paris in the 1920s, Sonia Delaunay was designing her simultaneous clothing, at first textiles, then scarves that were draped and wrapped around the body. Although the bright colours and draped layers detracted some attention away from the body, the designs were also seen as provocative and modern, with the wearer taking control of her body (Buckberrough, 1995). Costuming for performances by various avant-garde groups was also a way that clothing entered the art world. Anti-naturalist art movements, and Futurist, Constructivist and Bauhaus theatre, as well as Dada cabaret all explored costumes that further expressed their ideas (Baert, 1998, p.76).

life. Beuys uses the very formal figure of 'suit' to speak of an extremely personal moment in his life. He subverts this formality by constructing the suit from felt, a thick, warm almost suffocating fabric communicative of protection and care. Beuys transforms a mundane, overtly public, formal garment into an intimate, touching artwork. The artists from this period who made conceptual work using clothing as a sign for the absent body were starting to explore the idea of the body as subjective and as socially constructed, which would be explored further by subsequent artists (Baert, 1998, p. 77).



Fig. 1, Joseph Beuys. *Felt Suit*. 1970. Felt, multiple 150 x 70 x 10cm.

Fig. 2, Glynis Humphrey, *Gorge*. 1996. Voile, tulle, crinoline, polyester, cotton, canvas, pencil rod, chicken and grid wire, clamps, pinning devices, steel tension wire 460 x 275 cm (women's dress size 66).

Art of the early second wave of Feminism in the 1970's did much to cement the contemporary practice of removing clothing from its function and using it instead as a sign for the body. Specific clothing was used as costume in performance, film and video art, but more significantly appeared abstracted from the body. Early Feminist art brought to the forefront the idea of the body as "a fundamental ground of experience" (Ibid.), one which was explicitly and culturally gendered. The clothing that once surrounded that body was, by implication, explicitly gendered too. Clothing was also useful in the connotations it held towards 'feminine' domestic craft which many women sought to reframe and recontextualise in the art world.

Moira Gatens, an Australian feminist theorist, talks of 'imaginary' bodies. This is a term she uses to describe the body that is collectively imagined within a culture. She believes that it is actually impossible to represent the generic human body, given that people are so diverse. Gatens uses the term 'imaginary' to discuss the bodies that are represented in our culture, "those ready-made images and symbols through which we make sense of social bodies and which determine, in part, their value, their status and what will be deemed their appropriate treatment" (Gatens, 1996, p. viii). These 'imaginary' bodies are necessarily not generic representations, yet are often held up as generic or ideal.

Gatens is particularly interested in the representation of the female 'imaginary' body, which she believes is most removed from the reality of everyday life. To those people who would dismiss male bias in Western culture as simply superficial, or argue that images or ideas in our social practices do not have an impact on our individual lives, Gatens says: 'whether we care to admit it or not, we are historical beings whose language, stock of images and social practices constitute an unconscious dimension of our social heritage' (Gatens, 1996, p. xi). Feminist artists in the 1990's understood how entrenched in Western language and culture this bias is. Some of these artists turned again to the medium of clothing to make work that engages with and challenges this culturally embedded prejudice.

Much of this work dealt with issues surrounding the social and cultural expectations many women feel in regard to body shape and size. These artists used clothing to represent Gatens' 'imaginary' body, which they then subverted. Canadian artist Anne Ramsden's shop window style installation *Dress!* is a representation of feminine glamour. A long, sleek evening gown made from green satin that ends in a luscious pile on the floor, this work evokes the dress as object of desire. However this desire will never be fulfilled; impossibly long and narrow, no woman could ever fit into this dress (Baert, 1998, pp. 82-83).

Glynis Humphrey's *Gorge* (fig. 2) on the other hand, is so exaggerated in size that several women at once could fit into it. Measuring 4.6m in height and 2.75m wide, it has a hemline circumference of 13.4m. It weighs 113kg and Humphrey used 400m of voile in its construction (Baert, 2001, pp. 16-17). It is a pinkish flesh colour, and with the obvious reference its title makes to over eating, this work is as much a representation of cultural pressure to maintain specific body shape as Ramsden's. Both works take the form of the 'dress' and exaggerate elements of it to make it no longer wearable, making the point that the 'ideal' body size we are being encouraged to achieve is for many equally unattainable.

The form of the 'dress' is a powerful sign for the body in Western Culture. Use of the specifically gendered 'dress' is "a potent symbol and vehicle through which to reconceptualize and remetaphorize issues of identity as these circulate through bodies, social spaces and representational sites" (Baert, 1998, p.79). It is this idea that exploration of the body and where it sits socially leads to investigation of identity that I am specifically interested in. While Ramsden and Humphrey's works are interesting, I have chosen to investigate the work of Caroline Broadhead, Anne Ferran and Lesley Mitchison, whose work confronts ideas around making, history and identity, as well as the body.

The Easy Rules of Pattern Alteration

The female form as empty vessel and the work of Caroline Broadhead

In dreams, a writing tablet signifies a woman, since it receives the imprint of all kinds of letters. (Artemidorus, as cited in Warner, 1985, p. vii)

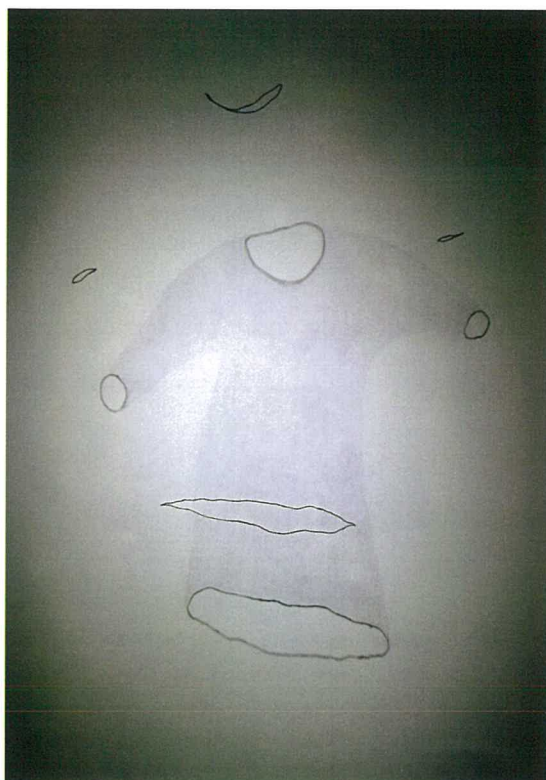


Fig. 3, Caroline Broadhead. *Dress with Black Holes*. 1998. Wire, cloth, paint. 150 x 150 x 30cm.

Caroline Broadhead is a British artist who since 1992 has been working with lightweight, translucent dresses, to explore “the nature of human presence, both in its physicality and in its memory” (Theophilus, 2001, p.11). Broadhead says of her reasons for choosing to work with clothing: “it allowed me to make reference to the whole body or person... and secondly, clothing, being familiar and common to all, assured a point of communication” (Broadhead, as cited in Harris, 1999, p.40). Yet Broadhead has chosen to work specifically with women’s clothing, and I believe her work alludes to many ideas surrounding representation of the female form in Western culture.

Broadhead’s work incorporates shadows thrown from the garments she makes. The ‘shadows’ in her work have often started to gain more presence and weight than the garment itself. Often painted or drawn onto the wall, the shadows carry patterns and designs that the actual fabric of the dress sometimes does not. In some cases, the shadow is painted onto the wall when there is no dress to cast it, as in fig. 3, *Dress with Black Holes*. The actual physical ‘dress’ exists only as a black neck, two cuffs and a hem, or four ‘black holes’.

Broadhead talks of the shadows in her work representing the other side of our nature, the “darker side, the negative double of the person” (Ibid.). However I believe they also speak of a different ‘other’, that of the female body which would inhabit them. If the dress is once removed from the real body, then the ‘shadow’ is twice removed, an image still retaining the shape of its referent, but a long way from its original self. In *Dress with Black Holes* the original body and the dress that represents it appear to have been sucked into four small voids where its head, arms and legs should have been. Like a ghost, the shadow that remains has been painted in by the artist. The brushstrokes give it texture that we imagine is thrown from the flimsy fabric we cannot quite see; these ‘shadows’ are emphatically women.

Marina Warner, in her book *Monuments and Maidens*, endeavours to explore the origins of the female form as bearer of meaning to “throw some light on the plural significations of women’s bodies and their volatile connections with changing conceptions of female nature” (Warner, 1985, p. xix). Taking as an example Pandora, and Eve, the first women in both ancient Greek and Judeo-Christian mythology, Warner points out how their subjectivity is denied them, and meaning external to themselves is placed onto them.

Pandora and Eve are both created by a God, they are ‘subject matter’ quite literally (Warner, 1985, p. 222), neither name themselves, and both inspire desire rather than feel it. From our mythical beginnings, women in Western Culture exist as an empty vessel into which men pour meaning. As Warner says:

They are both subject too, not in the sense that they have been given a voice to speak with in the first person, for their subjectivity is in fact denied them. Rather they are given a character by their authors, by the deities and men who take on a mother’s role in making them. They become... the very first mothers of men and women. At the same time, with the social institution of marriage... that primacy is changed into subjection. (Ibid.)

In ancient Greek mythology, deities had many powers, one of which was an ability to take control of people and direct their actions. Many of what we now know as Christian virtues were adapted from Greek or Roman deities, and the early Greek and Roman writers who we glean this information from “do not distinguish between personal gods and active principles” (Warner, 1985, p.70). There is no distinction in, for example, Hesiod’s stories “between *dike* the principle of justice and an aspect of Zeus’s power, and Dike, his divine daughter” (Ibid.).

It was early Christians, endeavouring to mark the differences between themselves and the pagan world, who gradually appropriated some of the Greek divinities and transformed them into “allegorical interpretations” (Warner, 1985, p. 79). Disassociating them from their personal power, “made it possible to view them as embodied aspects of the ideal” (Ibid.), and they were transformed into virtues and the liberal arts. Virtues then became an element of human nature, rather than an external force that took people over. If they did exist in the exterior world, it was only as allegory, and it was at this point that the virtues began to take on feminine gender.

The gendering of these highest of values was a surprising phenomenon even to early Christian theologians. It was noted that the “oddness of languages alignments” (Warner, 1985, p.64) seemed incongruous with women’s perceived nature. This supposed incongruity came about precisely because of women’s assumed inferior status. In the Greek and the Latin, abstract nouns of virtue are feminine because the grammatical use of the female gender had come to imply effects or actions (Warner, 1985, p.68). The secondary role of women playing itself out in language was the very reason the virtues, or idealised values, came to be personified by women.

The female form remained linked to virtues into the nineteenth century, but around the beginning of the twentieth something interesting began to happen. Warner describes Paris in *Monuments and Maidens* as a city brimming with allegorical female forms represented in statues through many centuries; however around the turn of the twentieth century these allegorical women started to make their way off buildings and onto walls. The Gare de Lyon train station was decorated with “naked belles emblematic of the railways’ gifts to civilization” (Warner, 1985, p. 86). Meanwhile in the Hotel de Ville, wall painted maidens such as *Le Telephone* and *Le Gaz* lolled around in wisps of fabric, with a telephone, and a gas lamp and gasometer respectively, with little attention paid to the correct gender of the language (Ibid.).

Contemporary artists such as Oscar Roty began to annex the language of personification of the new technologies, and Roty made:

One of the earliest advertising plaques, showing a naked mother pouring wine into the mouth of a child at her breast... A soft sell, displaying solicitude and virtue, the advertisement taps the symbolic identification of Charity and Nature with the nursing mother to persuade consumers of the efficacy of the product. (Ibid.)

This earliest advertising used the female form in a way modern advertising still does, as passive bearer of meaning.

In a piece called *The Female Form Defined*, Warner discusses one of the ways this idea of women having meaning invested into them is played out in the present day. *The Female Form Defined* is written about the Paris fashion shows of 1984, and draws a modern parallel with the virtue statues:

The decorative girls on the fabric of the Louvre, and the decorative girls inside the tents, both make a claim on behalf of the originators: the palace proclaims the greatness of France, and all her qualities. The pret-à-porter shows tell us a bit about the same, in a different way, but using the same metaphor, the abstracted impersonal figure. (Warner, 2003, p.30)

The designers project the aspirations of their society onto the models the same way that aspirations were previously projected onto the blank women comprising the virtue statues.

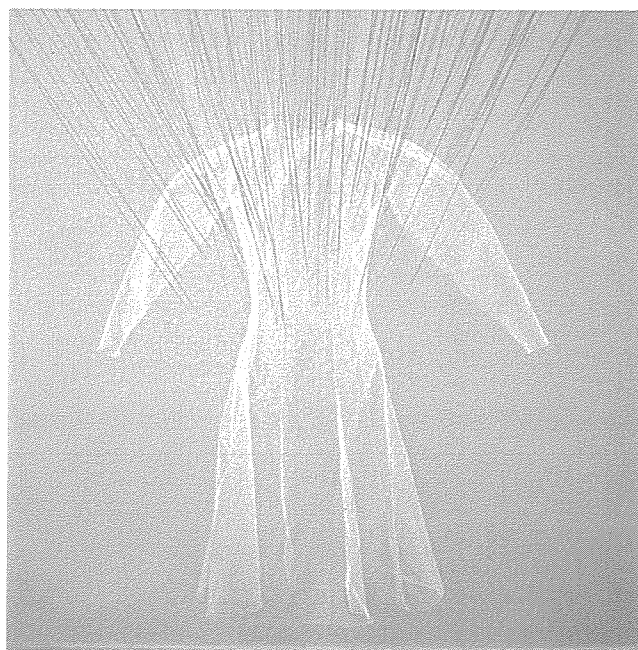


Fig. 4, Caroline Broadhead, *Suspend*. 2001. Tulle, thread.

Warner suggests that the only way to extract ourselves from the maze of “allegorical anthropomorphism” (Warner, 1985, p.266) may be to do away with direct representations of the body completely. “Perhaps we can only escape... through such severe severance from its symbolism, which has determined that the ideal female body, fitting container of high and virtuous meaning, should be an impossible object, like a sieve which does not leak” (Ibid.). Caroline Broadhead’s works of art are impossible objects. Flimsy, floating fabrics, which seem to be only half made garments that nevertheless stay upright and in place, these are no ordinary clothes. Broadhead’s works are literally empty vessels, vessels that are so empty, there is almost nothing there.

Broadhead captures in her work the tension between the personal and the symbolic that Warner lays out in *Monuments and Maidens*. The symbolic ideas Warner discusses need to be brought into the real and exercised by individual women. Broadhead's work uses the symbolic form of the 'dress', but also takes it somewhere new. According to Warner this is the way to challenge the prejudicial assumptions inherent in our language and culture.

As Aristotle argued, mimesis - imitation - brings about methexis - participation - and a constant exchange takes place between images and reality. We are living now among female forms who have adapted the allegorical language of the past, but are not reproducing it in stone or plastic or copper, but enacting it live in order to take up tenancy of the hollow monuments and enter that process of individual and collective imagination by which 'imperishable things are imitated by things in a natural condition of change'. (Warner, 1985, p.37)

Caroline Broadhead's work is 'enacting' Warner's ideas. Light translucent forms that hang caught in mid-air; we hold our breath because we fear we will blow them away. Yet they are strong and always stay in place. By using clothing, Broadhead can explore issues surrounding the representation of women without reproducing actual bodies. She is enacting the idea of woman as other, as removed, and as 'empty vessel'. She is showing us the inside of these ideas, that we can look straight through them, and that the shadow they cast is sometimes stronger than the idea itself.

Construction Data

Objects, community, tradition and the work of Anne Ferran

Destiny comes from the Latin destino meaning that which is woven or fixed with cords and threads. A dress with its formal elements of colour, shape, line and balance creates an icon that defines woman, deciding what to show and what to hide and placing her in a specific time, place and class. (Hawkes, 1998, p.236)



Fig. 5, Anne Ferran, *Untitled (blue slip)*, from *Longer Than Life*. 1998. C Type Photogram

Anne Ferran is an Australian artist whose photographic practice has been concerned with the place of women in Australian colonial history. In 1998, Ferran became Artist in Residence at the Rouse Hill Estate, a historical house that had housed the same family since 1813. Ferran found that the drawers in the bedrooms were still full of clothes from the nineteenth century, dresses, bodices, skirts, petticoats and collars. She proposed a “metaphorical x-ray of the building, beginning with these clothes” (Batchen, 2002, p.143).

Over six months she made photograms³ of all the garments. Life size, these x-ray like

³ The photogram is one of the earliest photographic processes. Made by placing an object directly onto light sensitive paper, then shining light through the object, when developed you have an 'x-ray' image. Translucent objects work most effectively in this process, giving a tonal image rather than flat black and white areas. Photograms, despite being two dimensional, give a remarkable sense of the three dimensionality of an object. That which is touching the paper is 'sharp' and the further away from the paper the object is, the blurrier it becomes, this narrow 'depth of field' gives the illusion of depth. Another element of photograms is that they are necessarily exactly the same size as the object being printed from. Ferran's images of dresses are the same size as the dress itself; she had to make one whole room in the house into a 'camera obscura' to make her exposures.

images breathe life back into items of clothing that had been in drawers, carefully wrapped in tissue paper for years. Like the shadows in Caroline Broadhead's work, these images are twice removed from the original bodies that wore them. "Clothing is a physical memory, an imprint, a second skin to the body that once wore it. So these photograms are traces of the body twice over, imprints of imprints" (Ibid.). One of the great joys of the photogram is its three dimensionality. With a long exposure time the light begins to curl around the parts of the object that are not quite flat to the photographic paper. Every thread in the clothing Ferran prints from is individually delineated; if we looked closely enough we could see tiny fibres separating from the threads. The images float in an inky blackness and have real depth, as though the photographic print is pushing backward into the wall.

It matters to Anne Ferran's work that we know the history of these objects, and that we understand her attempt to document them. The physical touch that brings the object into contact with the paper, is the same touch that the object had to the body of the original wearer(s). Normally we would see these objects as specimens in a museum, but Ferran's work disrupts this because she brings them, and the women who once wore them, into the context of 'now'.

Raising the dead via photography, she transforms history into a séance, into a direct communion of past and present. Turned into a pictorial apparition, history is thereby brought back to life, not as the truth of the past but as a ghostly presence that still haunts and entrances, today and forever. (Batchen, 2002, p.144)

For these photograms to have life they must press against the clothing, as the clothing once laid close upon a person. The power of these photograms lies in their articulation of the presence of the person who is no longer there.

In her article *Objects in Conversation*, Janis Jefferies discusses the idea that objects have a 'material history', in terms of their making, their use, their physical history, and the way we "obsessively collect them" (Jefferies, 1997, p.37). Jefferies is interested in the "contradictory nature, both pleasurable and painful" (Ibid.) of the relationship between object and subject. She proposes that objects previously disregarded as only having meaning to the person they belong to are actually rich sites for exploring issues of "memory, absence, grief and remembrance" (Ibid.), and carry much of their own narratives. The narratives that are carried by objects are not only the narrative 'facts' we may know about them, they are also the imaginative narratives we as viewers bring to them.

These imaginary narratives are one of the powerful things about Anne Ferran's work. We know the 'facts' of the history of these objects, but through Ferran's representations we are

freed to imagine a whole world of stories about the clothes, and the women who wore them. These items of clothing have been passed through many hands, and have seen things we could never hope to remember, but it is exactly this limitation of our collective memory that opens up space for the imagination. We imagine the children who were christened in those gowns, slept in those nightdresses and grew up to be married in those wedding dresses.

In their piece *Waste Not Want Not: An Inquiry Into What Women Saved and Assembled - FEMMAGE*, Miriam Schapiro and Melissa Meyer discuss the collecting and keeping that women have done with the objects and artifacts which have held our personal history and meaning.

Spiritual survival depended on the harboring of memories. Each cherished scrap of percale, muslin or chintz, each bead, each letter, each photograph, was a reminder of its place in a woman's life, similar to an entry in a journal or a diary. (Schapiro and Meyer, 1978, p.153)

One of the ways items were traditionally reused and recycled was by making old clothing into quilts. In *The Quilters: Women and Domestic Art*, Patricia Cooper and Norma Bradley Buford describe how women in the pioneering American west used the construction of quilts to help build their lives. Young women were often taught about life over the making of a quilt; quilts were often made in groups, providing a social event that also created something useful and beautiful. Cooper and Bradley Buford describe the process of 'making' a community through one woman's 'making' of quilts:

We looked around us and realized she had laid the groundwork for the house with the quilts. The quilts were her base and from them she planned and completed her next project, the house. At each step she sank her roots deeper into the earth. (Cooper and Bradley Buford, 1999, p.25)

Connections were made down roads that led from one house to the next. These women made "a whole network, a grid of support" (ibid.); communities were built and sewn together. The materiality of these physical 'memories' is extremely important. Every scrap of fabric was once an item of clothing worn by someone you loved or were descended from; a quilt was like a visual family tree. And through the associations you remembered the people and the time you spent with them, in the same way that Daphne's shirts hold strong, important memories for me.



Fig. 5, Anne Ferran, *Untitled (green wedding gown)*. 2003. Unique C Type Photogram, 260 x 105cm.

Repetition has a large role to play in Anne Ferran's work. There is repetition in the actions of the maker, the wearer, the mender, the researcher, the arranger of the photograms and the photographer herself. In *Embodying Subjectivity*, Stephen Horne likens the repetitive dynamic of Minimalist art to "the practices of the craft tradition and in domestic labour, weaving, knitting, cooking etc." (Horne, 1998, p.36). He posits that bringing these practices into the art world had a "profound social and political significance. The processes, procedures and attitudes... have to do with characteristics of embodiment, formlessness, invisibility, repetition and lack of closure" (Ibid.). These are elements of both Anne Ferran's and Caroline Broadhead's work; both these artists are making work that emphasises the repetitive actions of traditional domestic craft. In Ferran's work especially, we "witness a history of the use of each piece of clothing, seeing inside them to those small and skilful acts of home economy - the labour of women - usually kept hidden from public gaze" (Batchen, 2002, p.143).

One of the delightful things about Anne Ferran's photograms is the way they show every stitch and patch where the clothing has been mended; the action of the photogram ensures that it is seen. The patching and repair becomes beautifully clear and we can see inside the garment in a way we never have before. We are not turning the garment inside out to see the inner side of it; we are literally looking inside of the cloth.

The careful, studied attention to detail in Anne Ferran's work alludes to the history inherent in the objects, the 'making' of community and the minutiae of traditional domestic craft. David Michael Levin sees this attention to the detail of history as something to be celebrated:

By virtue of patience, delicacy of touch, and gentle, careful motions, the (artist's) craft becomes an event of disclosing, a moment when the field of the gesture's encounter gives birth to, or makes appear, a "new thing," and the emotional depth of the field's reserve of enchantment is somehow itself made sensible for our emerging body of understanding. Whenever this kind of sensibility, this kind of reverence, is still handed down, as the gift of ancient tradition, there I think we will find a living response to the nihilism of our technological epoch. (David Michael Levin, cited in Horne, 1998, p.40)

Anne Ferran's photograms are not merely copying the history they evoke; they are a "new thing". They quietly open up to us, and remind us that there is a part of this world that still values the small gesture. My family has been making the small gesture, over and over, for many years and we still find joy in it. How I have been able to bring these family traditions into my practice has been a central concern of my thesis. That the small gesture itself may be a way of thinking, of processing our lives, is something I went on to research.

Tailoring Time

Thinking through making and the work of Lesley Mitchison

I admire the care that has been taken in repairing, mending and truly recycling fabrics. The resourcefulness of past generations should not be forgotten. (Mitchison, 1999, p.68)



Fig. 6, Lesley Mitchison, *Mend and Make Do II*. 1997. Woven, printed (devore), embroidered and assembled. Silk, cotton, polyester yarns. 74 x 50 x 10cm.

Lesley Mitchison is a British artist who creates the fabric she uses in her work. She explores elements of clothing, especially corsets, weaving her fabric in very neutral tones similar to the skin tones traditionally used for corsetry. Mitchison chose to work with this form because of the “social implications of the corset image, as it has often been used as a metaphor to convey the position of women and to deal with issues of gender” (Mitchison, 1999, p.64). Renée Baert, in discussing the work of artists who make clothing that challenges the shape of the bodies they are referencing, also describes Mitchison’s work when she says:

they are an overcoming of anatomical literalness to re-imagine the contours of the body in terms of affect and gesture, to figure a host of movements and moods that are materially externalised through expressive garments (Baert, 2001, p.20).

Mitchison’s work embodies the pressure emanating from Western society being asserted on the female form.

In his book *The Art of the Maker*, Peter Dormer looks into what he calls ‘craft’, or ‘tacit’ knowledge. He proposes that this form of knowledge is something that we gain as we learn to make or craft something. Dormer describes making and thinking as being so intertwined as to be inseparable. This ‘thinking through making’ is an idea that sits well in relation to

Lesley Mitchison's work. Dormer tells us "in most complex crafts there is, for those expert in it, a form of dialogue going on between the practitioner, his (sic) expertise, and the goal that the practitioner is trying to make or find" (Dormer, 1994, p.19). This seems to me to be a description of the process Mitchison goes through as she is working and reworking her fabric. Dormer suggests that being an expert in a body of knowledge means living that knowledge, using it easily without even being conscious of it (Dormer, 1994, p.40).

Stephen Horne adds to Dormer's ideas by discussing a way of working that brings thought and action into harmony. He suggests that thinking is physical rather than cognitive, he sees in works of art that have been carefully made: "the intertwining of the body and the self... that constitute a reparative alternative to the metaphysical dualisms of action and thought, activity and passivity" (Horne, 1998, p.39). These ideas are important to my practice. I can plan a work prior to it being made but it is in the making that it really takes shape, emotionally as well as physically. As a child my love for my mother was expressed through the careful making of a pottery vase. Its presentation complete with hand picked daisies embodied the utter and unquestioning dependence and devotion a child has for their mother; the process of making informed and enhanced that meaning.

Also presenting an alternative to the dualist model of thinking versus action is bell hooks. In *Women Artists, the Creative Process*, hooks argues that women need to make room and time in their lives for leisure and quiet contemplation if they are to be successful as artists. hooks had noticed throughout her life that for her art (she is a poet and writer) to be successful, she also needed to have "the luxury of time - time spent collecting one's thoughts, time to work undisturbed. This time is space for contemplation and reverie. It enhances our capacity to create" (hooks, 1995, p.125). hooks looked into the lives of several successful male artists, and discovered that not only did they have this time to themselves, but they were happily granted it by their loved ones who recognised it as necessary to the creative process (hooks, 1995, p.127). She now makes an effort in her own life to give herself this time for contemplative thinking.

Often women who do take this time feel conflicted or guilty about taking so much time seemingly just for themselves. However, I suggest that through the generations women have found a way to take this time in a way that has at the same time allowed them to be constructive. I believe women can use the quiet, contemplative time it takes to sew and do crafts as thinking time. When bell hooks describes her time as "this stillness, this quietude, needed for the continued nurturance of any devotion to artistic practice" (hooks, 1995, p.126), I recognise the times in my life when I am sitting quietly embroidering or hand sewing.

Traditional domestic crafts can work as a way for women to take time out of their busy lives; the small, repetitive gestures become meditative, and the mind engages in a mode of thought different to that required for everyday life. This time, thought and action is very important to my creative process.



Fig. 7, Lesley Mitchison, *Sway Back*. 1995. Woven, printed and assembled. Cotton, polyester and monofilament yarns, polyester boning. 35 x 35 x 62cm.

In Mitchison's work we see the results of hours spent working and reworking fabric. She weaves the fabric in layers, and says: "I often deconstruct [the fabric] back into separate pieces to emphasise the memories trapped within clothes that we wear, keep or discard" (Mitchison, 1999, p.68). This process of creation then damage, strengthening then weakening allows Mitchison to literally get 'inside' the fabric. History and memory is wrapped into the very fabric of the garment; materiality becomes vitally important. Mitchison is emulating the making and mending of garments through the years, however this process is

as much about remaking and reworking her thoughts as her work. I see this as similar to the process described earlier of women collectively making quilts, reworking fabric from old garments and household linen into new stories in the form of 'quilt'. With her hands, Mitchison is creating new meaning and new threads of connection.

In her work *Sway Back*, Mitchison reconstructs two corsets, as they would have been made at the Spencer corset factory in Banbury, Oxford, as part of an exhibition commemorating the closing of the factory. Mitchison attempts to link the medical corset makers with the individual patient the corset would have been made for by stitching a name label onto each piece. These garments, while made in a factory, were made by one person for another already specified person. Mitchison celebrates the connection between these two people, and also gives the work meaning beyond the issues around the representation of women's bodies that the work immediately evokes. She raises the unique connection that links two people when one of them makes something so personal and meticulous for the other. Mitchison is using the time and action of working and reworking the cloth to patch and sew the meaning into her pieces.

The Three R's - Repairing, Remodeling, Remaking

Women's autobiographical making and the agency it facilitates

All seeing is hooded with loss - the loss of self-seeing.
(Peggy Phelan, as cited in Smith & Watson, 2002, p. vii)

If we have a language that communicates through making, what are the stories we are telling with it? Craft in its traditional form was, and often still is, used as a subversive method of self expression:

Craft is employed as a sign of alternative possibilities for social identity and community, usually grounded in a sense of historical depth, but without acceding to the authority of history to shape the present. In this sense, craft functions as a sign of an alternative, community-based creativity, resistant to the modernist notion of the heroic genius. (Rowley, 1999, p.16)

According to bell hooks, it is this type of community-based action that creates the space and time we require in our lives. She tells us that “we have to create oppositionally, work against the grain” (hooks, 1995, p.130) in order to find the time for ourselves that will enable us to write the stories and create the identities of strong, successful people.

In the Western philosophical tradition our identity made us into a “single unitary subject, construed as identical with itself” (Steyn, 1997, p.1). Who we were was something solid and dependable. Identity since Post-structuralism however has come to be regarded differently:

Identity (which may be as much about the future and the past, as the present) touches each one of us, reverberating within and throughout individual, social, political and cultural domains. The relationship between these is contingent, or in prospect, not already accomplished or given. (Ibid.)

One of the ways we negotiate this relationship is through constructing narratives for ourselves based on our memories. We do this initially and largely through language, but works of art are also ways we construct and communicate these stories.

Juliet Steyn tells us that these narratives are subject to constant change and re-working; the experience of shaping the story becomes what is ‘truth’ for us in our memories.

In a complex interplay between the experience that makes for the personal story and the personal story that structures the experience, the narrator discovers the meaning and significance of the experience (Fireman et al., 2003, p. 4).

If the structuring of the story has an effect on the story itself, so do the passing of time and the addition of new memories. The story we tell does not simply re-play old memories; it is constructed from the point of view of ‘now’, and we connect and explain it through this. The story of our identity changes as we grow and gather new experience.

The story also adapts in the telling. For most people the story we tell ourselves might be very different to the one we would relate to our friends, which may change again as we tell it to our family. The intended audience modifies the nuances of the narrative. We may not be lying, we may only be changing the emphasis, or the tone of voice, but through these subtle changes we embellish and elaborate on the basic narrative. This is a process that usually happens when we tell a story about ourselves, perhaps without our even being aware of it we modify our stories for our audience every day.

The modification that occurs in the telling can also become more conscious. In *Common Threads: Local Strategies for Inappropriated Artists*, Mireille Perron discusses the work of artist Karen Elizabeth McLaughlin:

One reads in the sewing (this desire to transact) the story of a woman who seeks to change (re-edit) her (and our) attitudes to her (and our) familial reality. Her (our) only certainty is the instability of the feminine subject in her (our) matrilineal history. (Perron, 1998, p.130)

McLaughlin is writing her own story in the work, and to a certain extent making it up as she goes. What better way to re-write the creation myths described by Marina Warner, where the first women were created by men? In this myth, woman creates herself.

The connection to objects in this story telling is strong. We can make objects and 'endow' them with our personal characteristics to write our own narratives, whichever account we want that to be. Janis Jefferies also recognises the power objects have to tell our stories.

Their (objects) contemplation in philosophical, psychoanalytical and phenomenological registers is not achievable at the level of a singular theory but rather as an autobiographical engagement. The self, myself and the processes of subjectivity are constantly shifting in this encounter. (Jefferies, 1997, p.38)

We make and use objects as part of the constant negotiation going on between our memories, our hopes for the future and our experience of the present that makes up our 'identity'.

This autobiographic re-making of the self is reminiscent of *Écriture Féminine* (feminine writing). Contemporary French feminists developed this experimental form of writing in France in the 1970's. Associated most closely with Helene Cixous, but also linked to Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, *écriture féminine* is a writing style that weaves "texts of extreme complexity which might best be described as 'theoretical fictions' in that traditional distinctions between theory and fiction are deliberately ignored or transgressed" (Macey, 2000, p.106). Autobiography merges into fantasy, and there is an emphasis on experience

through the body, particularly the maternal body. This is reminiscent of the art works looked at here. All three artists discussed have placed particular emphasis on the experience of the body, all having represented it in clothing, which plays on Moira Gatens 'imaginary' female body rather than alluding to a specific body. This freeing up of identity allows the artists to be associative with meaning in a way that they might not otherwise have been able to if they were representing a specific body.

It is important that these artists are free to be associative in this way. As we have seen through the work of Marina Warner, social constructions of gender and women's identities are not to be trusted because they are exactly that - social constructions. Sarah Charlesworth recognises this when she discusses women's "autobiographical strategies", which are often criticised as "insufficiently mediated" (Charlesworth, 1995, p.16). She asks,

One wonders, of course, mediated by whom? Is it incumbent on those versant in critical theory to mediate the practice of "grass roots" feminist politics? Certainly not. To maintain a rigorous ongoing project of analysis that involves the acknowledgement of actual differences in perspective of generation, nationality, class, race, and sexual orientation and that seeks consistently to question the import of inherited languages and conceptions of practice is perhaps more valid. (Ibid.)

Charlesworth recognises that the distortion put onto women's lives as we look at them through culture is perhaps best addressed by an autobiography that distorts back.

Using tools explored in this thesis, I have found that taking elements of women's lives and turning them until they become an artwork becomes important beyond simply that particular artist and those particular pieces. Women telling their stories in the way they want them to be told, true, fictional or fantastical, becomes a way of challenging the long history Western culture has of making women 'other'; a history so embedded in our society it is fixed in language. The language that communicates via making is a suitable language to tell alternative stories; women have been using this language for generations, often passed down mother to daughter, grandmother to granddaughter. This is the way that I learnt this language, through family, through experience of simply making around other people who were doing the same. This is the language and the knowledge I have chosen to pick up and employ to create my own story.

Important Closings

A conclusion

Ferran induces history to render itself translucent. In the process she offers the possibility of an artist's history, an accounting of time's past that is markedly different from the carefully regulated, chronological narratives produced by art historians and sociologists. (Batchen, 2002, p.141)

When I was a child, too much television was frowned upon in our house. Simply sitting on the couch doing nothing else but staring at the TV was a waste of valuable time. Making was one way around this; if I was knitting or hand sewing it was alright to also be watching TV. I knew that 'making' was not lazy or idle, but a positive activity to be engaged in. I also learned that it was a different kind of activity than most, one that required my attention and care but also moved my mind and body into a different method of functioning.

Through making I could be graceful in a way I never could playing sport. I may be an awkward runner, and have never done a proper cartwheel, but my hands and mind can work together in an incredibly sophisticated way to create remarkable things. It seems natural to me to be able to do this, just as it was natural for my mother, my grandmother, and many generations before me.

Using the medium of clothing, this thesis has engaged with issues surrounding the use of the female form and Western cultures use of it as a site onto which meaning can be placed. Engaging with elements of my practice I have been able to investigate the history of 'making' in my family, and the language that making speaks. I have successfully negotiated a space between the personal and the symbolic, telling my own story, while leaving enough room for the audience to also imagine theirs.

The stories we tell using these tools are unique and important. Our bodies, our genes are "histories that lie in material wait. And so the materiality of memory becomes a phenomenon of the future as well as a legacy of past materiality" (Smith, 2003, p.89). When Marina Warner suggested: "we are living now among female forms who have adapted the allegorical language of the past"(Warner, 1985, p.35), *Woven Seam Binding Stay* is what she meant. I take the allegorical language that inherently personifies women; I move it onto objects that through their use as a sign imply the same. I then craft and cajole these objects to generate connections, bind ideas and weave tales yet to be told.

Appendix 1.

Documentation of final installation *Woven Seam Binding Stay*



Fig. 9. Caroline McQuarrie. *Woven Seam Binding Stay* installation view. 2005. Artist's documentation.



Fig. 10. Caroline McQuarrie. *Woven Seam Binding Stay* installation view. 2005. Artist's documentation.



Fig. 11. Caroline McQuarrie. *Woven Seam Binding Stay* installation view. 2005. Artist's documentation.



Fig. 12. Caroline McQuarrie. *Woven Seam Binding Stay* installation view. 2005. Artist's documentation.

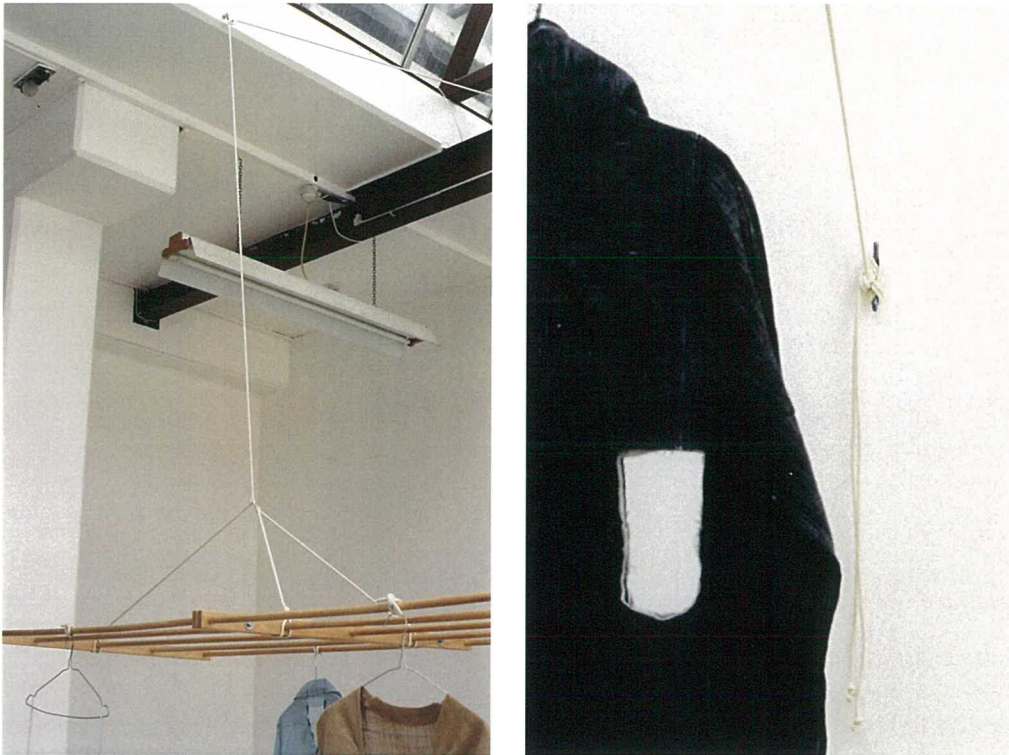


Fig. 13. Caroline McQuarrie. *Woven Seam Binding Stay* installation view. 2005. Artist's documentation.



Fig. 14. Caroline McQuarrie. *A Dress for Angela*. 2005. Hessian, embroidery thread and wire coat hanger. 180 x 70 x 20 cm. Artist's documentation.



Fig. 15. Caroline McQuarrie. *A Jersey for Sally (my sister)*. 2005. Knitting wool, tapestry wool and wire coat hanger. 120 x 40 x 10 cm. Artist's documentation.



Fig. 16. Caroline McQuarrie. *A Shirt for Grandma*. 2005. Fabric, synthetic batting, buttons and wire coat hanger. 80 x 100 x 20 cm. Artist's documentation.



Fig. 17. Caroline McQuarrie. *A Jacket for Mum*. 2005. Fabric, cotton batting, buttons and wire coat hanger. 170 x 80 x 25 cm. Artist's documentation.



Fig. 18. Caroline McQuarrie. *A Blouse for Daphne*. 2005. Fabric, buttons, embroidery thread, wire coat hanger. 90 x 60 x 10 cm. Artist's documentation.

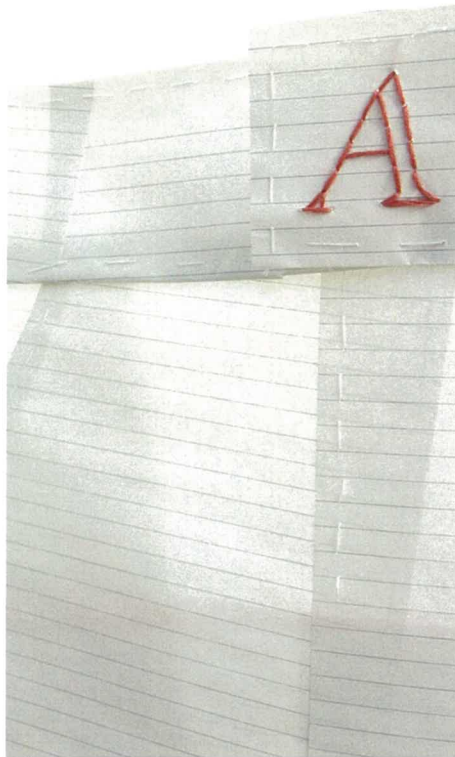


Fig. 19. Caroline McQuarrie. *A Skirt for Alison*. 2005. Writing paper, thread, embroidery thread, wire coat hanger. 150 x 70 x 25 cm. Artist's documentation.

Appendix 2.

Documentation of developmental work

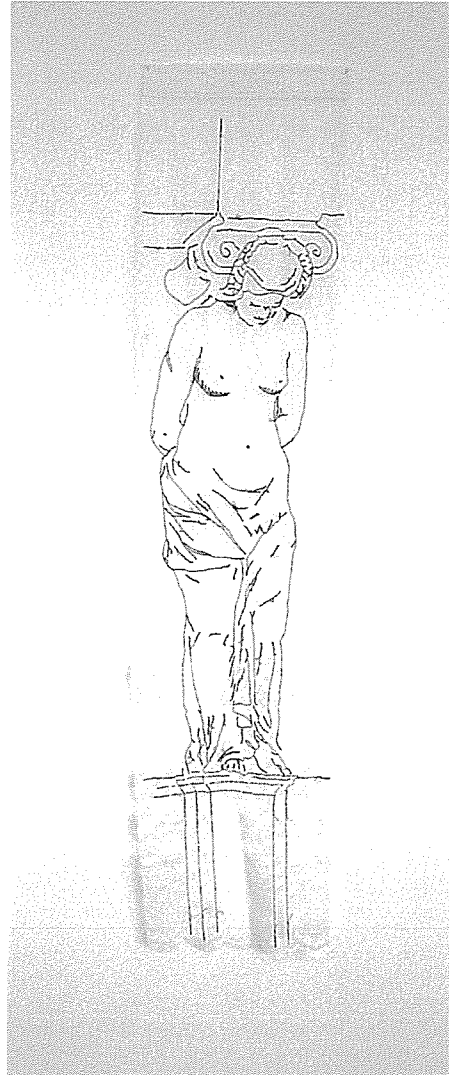
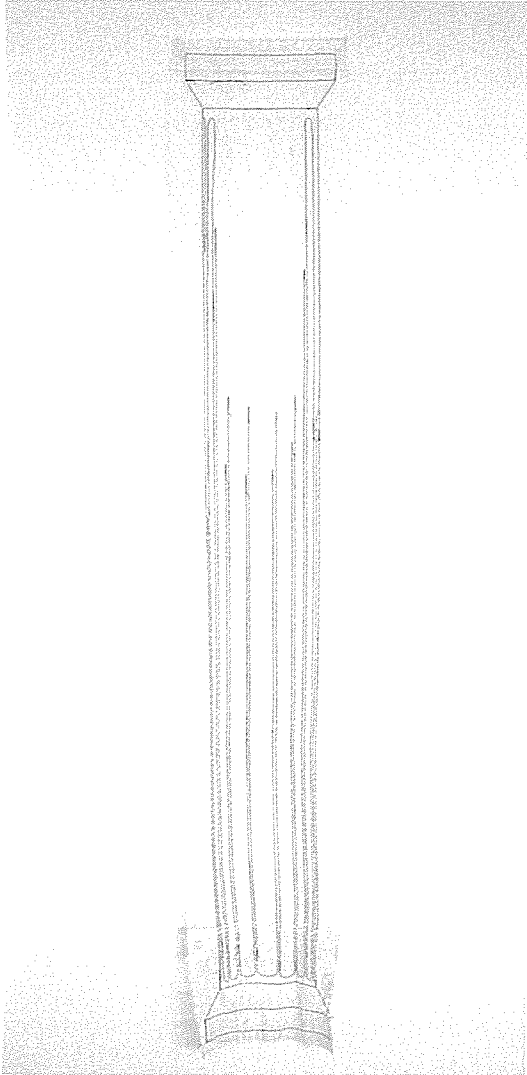


Fig. 20. Caroline McQuarrie. Column and caryatid embroidered onto net curtain. 2005. Net curtain, embroidery thread, 180 x 30 cm, and 150 x 30cm. Artist's documentation.



Fig. 21. Caroline McQuarrie. Three-dimensional satin and two-dimensional crocheted caryatids. 2005. Satin, chicken wire and MDF, Knitting wool and wire, 120 x 50 x 50 cm, 105 x 30cm. Artist's documentation.



Fig. 22. Caroline McQuarrie. Collars made for (from top left) my grandmother, Angela (friend), my sister, Daphne, my mother and Alison (friend). 2005. Fabric, all approx 10 x 25 x 25 cm. Artist's documentation.

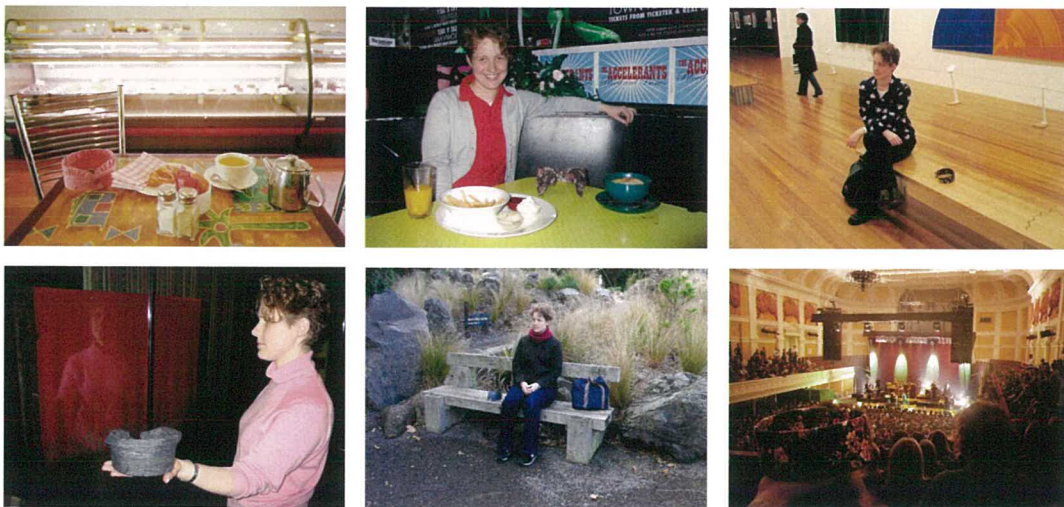


Fig. 23. Caroline McQuarrie. The collars photographed on location as though they were the person whom they represent. From top left: Grandma in a cake shop, Angela in a cafe, Daphne in a gallery, Mum in a museum, my sister on a bushwalk, and Alison at a concert. 2005. 'C' type photographic prints, 5 x 7 in. Artist's documentation.

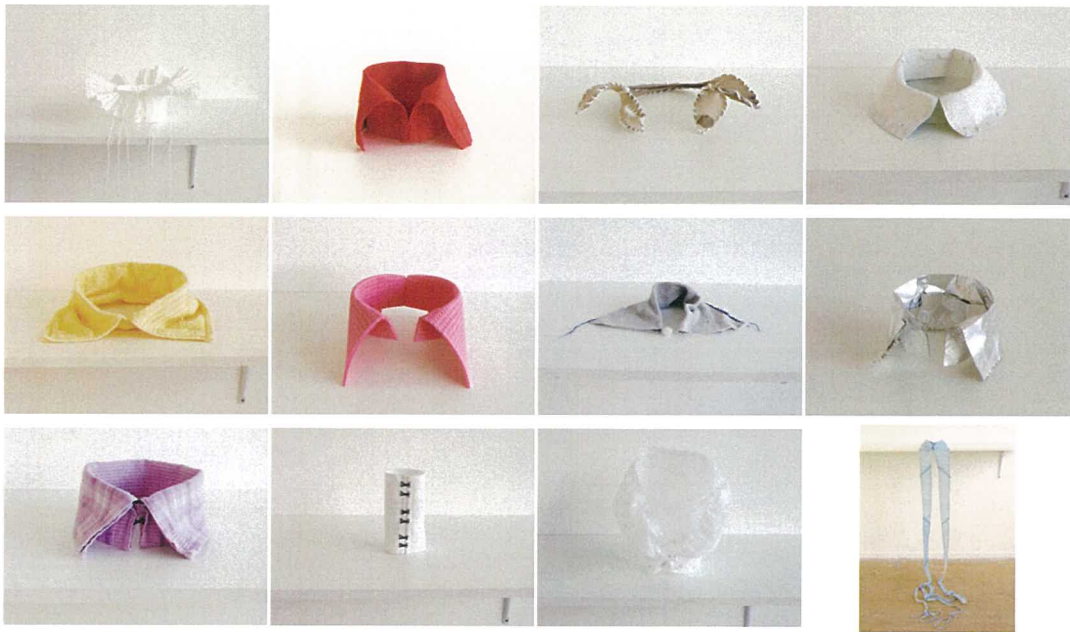


Fig. 24. Caroline McQuarrie. Collars (some). 2005. Curtain tape and curtain hooks, bias binding, pantihose and wire, block-out curtain lining, towel, sponge, rag, tinfoil, tea towel, elastic, tracing Vilene, Chux cloth, various sizes, ranging from 8 x 8 x 8 cm to 200 x 25 x 25 cm. Artist's documentation.



Fig. 25. Caroline McQuarrie. Details of collars (some). 2005. Curtain tape and curtain hooks, bias binding, pantihose and wire, towel, sponge, rag, tea towel, elastic, tracing Vilene, Chux cloth, various sizes. Artist's documentation.

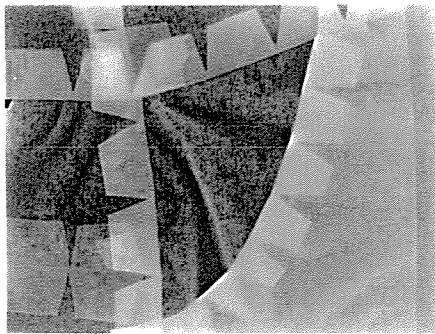
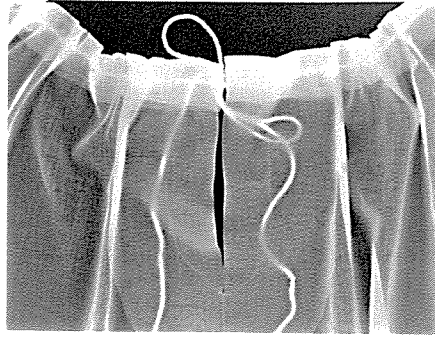


Fig. 26. Caroline McQuarrie. Photograms made from enlargements of small areas of clothing. 2005. Silver gelatin photographic print, 16 x 12 inches (40.6 x 30.5 cm). Artist's documentation.

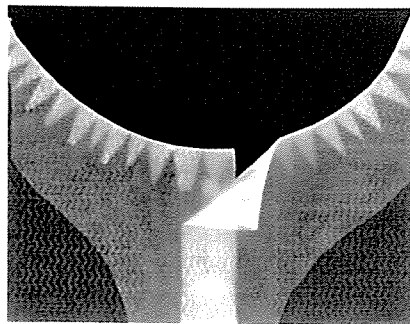
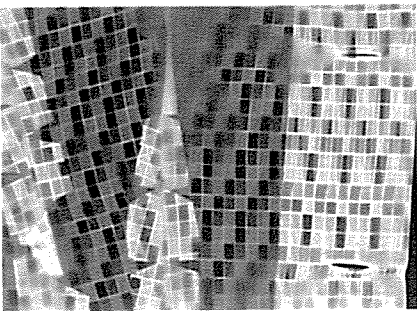


Fig. 27. Caroline McQuarrie. Photograms made from enlargements of small areas of clothing. 2005. Silver gelatin photographic print 16 x 12 inches (40.6 x 30.5 cm). Artist's documentation.



Fig. 28. Caroline McQuarrie. Collars and photograms presented together. 2005. Various materials, various sizes. Artist's documentation.



Fig. 29. Caroline McQuarrie. *A Skirt for Alison*, first version. 2005. Paper, thread, cotton tape, wire coat hanger. 150 x 60 x 50 cm. Artist's documentation.

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