

THE 100% AUSTRALIAN OWNED TEXTILE ART MAGAZINE

#132  
DEC 2018

\$9.95 AUD  
\$15.00 NZ

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MARIMEKKO

WEARABLE ART

NIKKI PARMENTER



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► Jacinta McDonald, *Atrophy of Love* - regenerated textile from discarded novel pages, stitching and heat treatment; riso-screenprinting on unitard. Finalist Wearable Art Mandurah 2018 and progressive garment artist 2019. Photo: Stephen Heath, courtesy Wearable Art Mandurah

# WEARABLE ART: AN ANTIDOTE TO FAST FASHION?

Australia

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*Wearable Art Mandurah and Freemantle's South Metropolitan TAFE (SM TAFE) have developed a partnership – now in its third year – which provides new opportunities for students studying the Certificate IV, Diploma and Advanced Diploma in Applied Fashion Design and Merchandising. In this Class Act feature article Lisa Piller, Lecturer and Discipline Leader for Fashion Business, explains how the project has contributed to the journey of six fashion students enabling them to explore an alternative to fast fashion. Their work is a celebration of experimental, innovative and artistic approaches, which suggests much about a regeneration of the craftsmanship of fashion.*

**I**t started as a classroom brief, whereby South Metropolitan TAFE (SM TAFE) fashion students were asked to “explore the integration of craftsmanship and technology; create a design where traditional artistry meets future innovation”. What resulted was a glimpse into the capabilities of our young emerging design talent and their engagement and joy in textile manipulation and innovation. Jasmine O’Brien took inspiration from the story of the *Hasidic Salt Bride*, a work created by Israeli-born artist Sigalit Landau. Landau suspended a vintage gown in the Dead Sea for 6 weeks until it crystallised. In her work titled *Tetraborate*, Jasmine explored a way of germinating and growing a gown from inception out of sodium tetraborate crystals. Jasmine said of her creative process, “I grew and cured tetraborate crystals by hand. During the process my crystals grew and morphed from the pot on my stove and I let nature guide my process in the intricate shapes, formations and textures that evolved.”



► Jasmine O'Brien, *Tetraborate* - 'grown' borax crystal dress. "Found floating in a tetraborate sea, caught on the seafloor by the hair of her creator, the dress waited to dance a cloud and crawl out of the sea."  
Photo: Justin Griffiths.  
Model: Dana Whitehead  
Vivien's Model Management.

Classmate Gabby Rule intersected the traditional handcraft of macramé with acrylic polycarbonate sheeting and knotted and wove wool yarn through channels in the polycarbonate to link and construct an architectural kimono-style gown titled *Six Easy Fleeces*. Gabby experienced the reward of “transforming shape, colour, texture and silhouette through the curation of a unique textile medium”.

The implications of this project and the work of these two young student designers' is worth considering. Firstly, what relevance can such emphasis on experimental textile innovation have for the current fast fashion industry model? And secondly, what effect can

fashion design educators have on this industry model by fostering creativity, innovation, and iterative experimentation in textiles and design?

The fashion sector operates largely within a linear, quick-turnaround apparel production model with an emphasis on short-lived trends and low-cost manufacture. It is supported by a consumer with a voracious demand for ever-cheaper fashion designs at an even faster pace. This comes at a distinct environmental and social cost. The role of the fashion design educator is therefore a complex one. We are ethically and professionally required to equip graduates with skills to be employable after graduation in



▲ Rochelle Peries, *Wild Swans*, heat treated and bonded plastic bags and polymer clay swan head ring. Photo: Stephen Heath, courtesy Wearable Art Mandurah.



▲ Rochelle Peries, *Wild Swans*, illuminated in Wearable Art Mandurah Showcase 2017, performed by Zoe Donaldson and John Curtin College of the Arts. Photo: Stephen Heath, courtesy Wearable Art Mandurah.

an industry characterised by an accelerated, linear model. Yet we have a wider social, environmental and ethical responsibility to support a shift to a more circular and regenerative design understanding and process.

Projects such as the annual Wearable Art Mandurah (WAM) collaboration with SM TAFE challenge fashion students to consider sustainable practice by examining new and inventive mediums to express a narrative. By moving away from commercial parameters students are encouraged through this project to demonstrate a freedom of material, form and process to create a wearable art design.

Rochelle Peries created a curious animalistic medium using bonding and heat treatment to produce a

feather-like veined texture from discarded plastic bags. Her design *Wild Swans*, won the tertiary category at the WAM Showcase in 2018. Rochelle sculpted a polymer clay ring to form the swan head, a mesmerising piece when combined with balletic movement during the showcase performance. Rochelle illuminated her design from within to demonstrate “the interaction between the moonlight human and the sensibility, shape and form of the daytime swan from the ballet *Swan Lake*”.

The immersion of fashion students in this experimental and conceptual process fosters a rejuvenation of traditional artisan practice and creativity in fashion design. It encourages the development of new innovations, and the incorporation of new technologies into their craft. This is highly desirable as an antidote to the fast fashion production models which do not allow adequate development time for experimentation and innovation, and informed and sustainable practice. As the fashion sector moves to large scale production models, artisan and specialised craftsmen diminish. Sadly, so too do the specialist techniques alongside them, no longer cost-viable in the industrialised model. Jasmine O’Brien revisited the traditional craft of Fortuny pleating in her work *Desensitisation* for the SM TAFE Wearable Art Exhibit at the Mandurah Performing Arts Centre in 2018. Pioneered as a technique by Spanish designer Mariano Fortuny in 1906, Fortuny pleating involves hand pleating silk to create tiny organic linear folds both delicate and textural.

Contrast this with the development work of Rebecca Vandeppeer, finalist for the wearable technology category of Perth Fashion Festival’s Future Runway in 2017. Her design, titled *Crossroads*, explored the future growth of Perth’s skyline, and the merging of Northbridge and the City. Rebecca said that *Crossroads* depicted “areas of Perth City identifiable through geographical landmarks printed on acetate, and 3D printed shoulder epaulettes represent the Perth skyline growing up, rather than out”.

Merging traditional craftsmanship with modern technologies, Catherine Kelly’s work titled *Fleur préservée*

was also exhibited at the Mandurah Performing Arts Centre in 2018. “My inspiration came from old photographs of dried, pressed or preserved flowers. I experimented with capturing dried or pressed flowers between two pieces of chiffon using a bonding substrate, ‘pressing’ the flowers between the fabric”, Catherine explained.

Equipping students of fashion with an opportunity to take part in conceptual projects that celebrate artisan textile and design processes may enable a new generation of creatives to bring the fashion design sector into a 21<sup>st</sup> century design context of social, ethical and environmental responsibility. Student work such as Jacinta McDonald’s *Atrophy of Love* demonstrates an innovation, craftsmanship and experimental creativity not present in the fast fashion sector. Jacinta’s design, a finalist in the WAM Showcase 2018, utilised riso-screenprinting as well as a regenerated textile created from discarded novel pages, stitching and heat treatment.

Jacinta is one of six selected artists working on the *Whispers Progressive Garment*, a collaborative design work that travels throughout Australia from artist to artist over a six-month period. The design and its narrative evolve and progress, with the contributing artists linking inspirations and responding creatively to one another. The final *Whispers Progressive Garment* will be revealed at the WAM Showcase in June 2019. Celebrating artisanship, slow fashion, co-creation and sustainability, it is a perfect antidote to mass produced fast fashion.

Lisa Piller, Lecturer and Discipline Leader for Fashion Business at South Metropolitan TAFE, Bentley Campus.

The South Metropolitan TAFE Wearable Art Exhibit took place at Mandurah Performing Arts Centre from 6-14 June 2018 and the Wearable Art Mandurah Showcase on 9 and 10 June 2018.

Look out for the SM TAFE Wearable Art Exhibit, 7-21 June 2019, and Wearable Art Mandurah Showcase, 15 and 16<sup>th</sup> June 2019, both at Mandurah Performing Arts Centre.

▶ Rebecca Vandeeper, *Crossroads*, embracing new technologies, printed acetate and 3D printed Perth skyline epaulette. Photo: Meiji Nguyen. Model: Azure Portman



▶ Gabby Rule, *Six Easy Fleeces*, macramé and Perspex sheeting. Photo: Justin Griffiths. Model: Elise Blom, Vivien's Model Management



▶ Jasmine O'Brien, *Desensitisation*, revisiting traditional craft, Fortuny pleating. Photo: Chantel Concei. Model: Lydia Moss Vivien's Model Management

