

Exploring the Interface: Negotiating the boundaries between art and craft

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ABSTRACT

Exploring the Interface negotiates the boundaries between the often-disparate practices of art and craft. The interface, as the point of interplay between these practices, is offered as a metaphor for the negotiation of the physical and psychical boundaries of self. This project asks how these practices can be navigated and if the interface can signify the spaces of one's emotional and corporeal identities. It also questions how the maternal relationship and feminine and domestic archetypes contribute to the construction of gender.

The project aims to extend the traditional use of domestic craft while honouring the semiotic potential of its feminine associations. I endeavour to create an expressive device from mute craft materials and techniques using the language of the object and the poetics of metaphor. I seek to evoke memory and the senses by activating the gallery space in a series of narrative dramas that play out inside domestic constructs.

My artwork takes the form of a series of installations using various materials ranging from those traditionally associated with domestic craft to more ephemeral organic matter. Handcrafted objects reside with ready-mades while garments and domestic artefacts nestle amongst furniture.

The project commenced with an investigation of various hierarchies pertaining to gender and practice. An exploration of traditional craft materials and techniques led to innovative approaches and a consideration of the maternal legacies of the craft tradition. The amassing of craft materials and objects suggested a wealth of memories, histories and untold narratives. The expressive potential of the craft object was explored and what emerged was the performative function of the artwork as a means of activating senses, memory and space.

Artists who extend craft beyond traditional application, including Judy Chicago, Fiona Hall, Freddie Robins, Anne Farren and Dave Cole, have influenced experimentation with the expressive potential of materials and techniques. The maternal relationship is explored through the work of Barbara Hanrahan, Lindsay Obermeyer and Kay Lawrence. Artworks by Anne Wilson, Jana Sterbak and Magdalena Abakanowicz inform body-specific work that focuses on corporeal elements of gender. Mnemonic artworks by Louise Bourgeois, Tracey Emin, Magdalena Bors and Doris Salcedo provide a reference for memory, narrative and domestic based installations.

Exploring the Interface focuses on negotiating various boundaries as a metaphor for the construction and deconstruction of ideas of self. The work takes up a symbolic position swaying between the physical and psychical spaces of subjectivity. Inner and outer domains manifest in narrative constructs that inspire and are inspired by memory and lived experience.

INTRODUCTION

The threading of a needle, natural to young, nimble fingers. The first awkward attempts at stitching clumsy monograms on gaudy fabric remnants. Naïve heart-shaped samplers plumped with stuffing to make pincushions. The mysterious glyphs of the dress pattern that revealed to the enlightened an illuminated path to the garment. Gazing enviously upon an elder sister, possessor of curves, holder of all the acquired wisdom needed to make the quantum leap into womanhood. The women surrounding me imparted the domestic skills needed to make this transition. A grandmother treading at an old Singer sewing machine, with a black patina that had long ago lost its lustre, a mother knitting the jumper you knew would sit at the bottom of a camphor chest, the older sister sitting on the floor amid a nest of gently rustling dress patterns. These are my memories, my female experience. Too young to understand the socio-political significance of what was occurring, I was ignorant of the gendering of these activities, the furtively powerful socialisation at play and the hard-fought battles of women generations my senior. These activities were never a burden; on the contrary I delighted in the process of making something by hand. Craft tools resided comfortably in hands seemingly adept at intricate tasks. I soon discovered the same dexterity with a pencil, and a passion for art emerged. Now, many years later, am I able to reconcile my art and craft practice? Can I negotiate the boundaries that have fragmented practice and influenced aesthetic judgement and taste? Since childhood I sensed that I existed in a kind of gender borderland. Can this interface between art and craft become a metaphor for my identity?

Art and craft can be disparate practices separated by hierarchical structures and fundamental differences in material, philosophical and theoretical approaches. For the purposes of this exegesis art is referred to as the creation of fine art for aesthetic or conceptual intent and craft specifically as the production of domestic artefacts for decorative and/or functional application. Gendered feminine, craft is still often perceived as ‘women’s work’ and devalued as trivial. With a foot firmly planted in both fields, *Exploring the Interface* asks how I can traverse the interface between these two practices. Can the navigation of this territory, which takes the form of the boundary, become a metaphor for the construct of my gender and subjectivity? Can the concept of the interface, the edge between inside and outside, become a symbol for both the corporeal and psychical spaces I occupy? Could a conscious exploration of the body’s physical and emotional boundaries result in the taking up

of a symbolic position through visual language? How can the maternal legacies of domestic craft tradition and feminine archetypes inform gender and contribute to the construction of a personal narrative?

My research is informed by the hierarchical value systems that highlight dichotomies of gender and practice, drawing upon the writings of art historians and theorists, including Rozsika Parker, Griselda Pollock and Gill Perry who repudiate traditional canons. In Chapter One I explore some of the roles played by society and craft in establishing the status of women and 'women's work'. These gender constructs are highlighted by an investigation of male privilege, the barriers encountered by women and their consequent confinement to the domestic arts. This leads to a consideration of the reassessment of what was traditionally deemed 'women's work' that occurred with the craft renaissances of the 1970s and 1990s. After centuries of ideological polarity, there is increasing dissolution of the categories of art and craft as the Modernist opinion that rejected craft as superficial and kitsch yields to reconsideration under postmodern practices.

My project widens the seams of the art/craft debate by reconciling the opposing denigration and inherent potential of domestic craft. In the current artistic climate when anything can be art, artists are coming to appreciate this boundless potential. I take up the recommendation of curators Robert Bell and David McFadden to explore the expressive and mutational possibilities of craft. By engaging the delicate, subtle and poetic aspects of the craft object, I seek to extend the eloquence of materiality.

My work honours and acknowledges domestic craft as a female emblem and embodiment of gender that communicates a female narrative. It is therefore intimately and intrinsically linked to experience and memory, identity and self. In Chapter Two I begin to explore the concept of identity and how the negotiation of various liminal positions can become metaphors for my subjectivity. Connections between my work and Arte Povera are established with a shared focus on the use of commonplace materials, activating the exhibition space, hybridised approaches and negotiating the gaps between life, art and audience. My previous work has relied upon the lyrical use of metaphor and the vernacular of the object. This is further developed through the use of symbolic language by exploiting the capacity for the familiar to evoke memory and emotion through personal associations. I challenge traditional modes of display by positioning the viewer within a profoundly domestic space defined less by walls than by the objects within a site that bears the stain of human occupancy. I explore methods of activating the gallery by encouraging the viewer not

to gaze upon a vertical wall, but to open, slide, unwind and rewind, smell, crouch, inspect and be within a space.

Identity, as one of the central issues in contemporary art, informs my research and its outcomes. Psychoanalytic and feminist theories provide an analysis of the social constructs of gender contributing to our notions of identity. Psychoanalytical and object-relations theory highlights the significant role the mother plays in forming identity. My research is embedded in the mother-daughter dyad with the works of Melanie Klein, DW Winnicott, Nancy Chodorow and Julia Kristeva providing important references. With Janice Doane's and Devon Hodges' *From Klein to Kristeva* as my primary source, in Chapter Three I explore this maternal relationship as a means of interrogating my subjectivity focusing on the role of motherhood as a cultural imperative which I have difficulty negotiating. Icons of fertility and maternity such as eggs, nests, vessels and the implication of menstrual blood are representative of this maternal relationship.

Chapter Four continues the investigation of subjectivity, addressing the work of Kristeva, Jacques Lacan, Luce Irigaray and Elizabeth Grosz and focusing on the body-based artwork, the object or garment as a body surrogate and the inescapable corporeality of the body. As a representation of both physical and psychical spaces my work grapples with the inner and outer workings of self, including the mortal failings of the body. This manifests in the vulnerable and ephemeral materiality of my objects, some of which are constructed of organic matter that faces the inevitable march of time.

My work is an intimate dialogue born from girlhood memories and inherited wisdom. In my family, where craft skills were expected as a prerequisite of gender, socks were darned, clothes mended, heirlooms created, buttons replaced and this was women's work. My objects embody my past and the memories associated with it. In Chapter Five I examine the role memory plays in my inception and execution, as well as the viewer's reading, of the work. The evocation of memory through visual, tactile and olfactory mechanisms is threaded through the project. I offer memory as one of our most crucial faculties and consider Marcel Proust's involuntary memory for its performative power to enact, and be enacted by, the senses. I also explore the ways in which the past, revisited, retold and reorganised, can act as a means of catharsis, healing and ritual purification.

CHAPTER ONE

The Foundation Garment: Examining hierarchies

The hierarchical value systems that stratify art forms are ideological constructs that exclude particular artistic practices and practitioners from the established order of fine art. These value systems highlight dichotomies of gender and separate art from craft. Anthea Callen asserts that '... such polarised binaries function ... to constitute negative "others" within our patriarchal culture' (eds Attfield & Kirkham 1989, p. 163).

Traditionally, painting and sculpture topped the hierarchical apex while the domestic arts were relegated to the sphere of lesser arts. This canon was sustained by a belief that the domestic arts required less intellectual input and were defined by manual skill and utilitarian function. Such polarised binaries highlight male privilege in the visual arts. Gill Perry emphasises the gendered separation of male-dominated high art from the feminine pursuit of the applied or decorative arts (ed. Perry 1999, p. 24).

Domestic craft, while perceived as the badge of a woman's gender and a measure of her worth, has often been patronizingly relegated to the lower echelons, dismissed as a trivial pastime. Art historians Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock argue that:

... it was by labelling certain aspects of artistic production 'domestic', by calling them crafts, that, in the evolution of the modern concept of art, the split between high art and the lesser arts was constructed: what distinguishes art from crafts ... is ... where these things are made, often in the home, and for whom they are made, often for the family (eds Attfield & Kirkham 1989, p. 154).

The Victorian era was a particularly influential epoch which intensified many aspects of our patriarchal society. Women became further disadvantaged and restricted by the roles and expectations by which they were defined. Catherine King observes that: 'The lower status of women was related to the notion of women's dependence on men and their supposed need to be cared for in the private sphere of the family and household...' (ed. Perry 1999, p. 35). The Victorian woman was ideologically confined to a private domestic realm denied access to the privileged public world of men. The ideal woman was custodian of the home and all aspects of her upbringing and education were geared towards this domestic paradigm and a socially endorsed career of wifedom and motherhood (Unwin 2004, p. 246).

Women's options were determined by prejudice and injustice in a society that believed creativity was the province of men. They encountered significant barriers limiting their art practice, including social restrictions, lack of academic training, limited access to the establishment, '... conflicts with domestic duties ... and perhaps most insurmountable their exclusion from the category of "genius"' (Unwin 2004, p. 246).

Women were excluded by canons of art established at an institutional level. Their exclusion from life classes and indeed from pedagogical foundations themselves meant that the prestige of history painting was out of reach. Women were confined instead to 'lesser' genres which became endowed with gender. A woman's art was biologically determined, as if the subjects suitable for female practice were those that reflected society's perception of her, subjects considered pretty and decorative, devoid of gravity or substance.

Anna Howitt (1799–1888) composed a heartfelt lament after attending a public lecture at the Royal Academy:

Oh! How terribly did I long to be a man so as to paint there ... one seemed stepping into a freer, larger and more earnest artistic world – a world alas! Which one's *womanhood* debars one from enjoying. Oh, I felt quite sick at heart ... I felt quite angry at being a woman, it seemed to be *such a mistake* (ed. Orr 1995, p. 35).

In frustration born from the limitations of her own gender, Howitt longs to cast off the burden of her sex. A woman who wanted to be an artist was not only asking for access to all the same privileges as her male counterparts, but also asking to be free of her gender and social obligations.

Women appear to be, in large part, missing from art history. As Parker and Pollock assert, '... modern art history produces a picture of the history of art from which women are not only absent, but identifies women artists as inevitably and *naturally* artists of lesser talent and no historical significance' (1981, p. 45). As a teacher of secondary art, I remember awkward piles of textbooks in the classroom, covered in dust. Oddly juxtaposed with a white board, large-screen computer and data projector, the fossil of a bygone era beside the shiny new hybrid car. I refer to Gombrich's *Story of Art*, from which women artists are conspicuously absent. I braved the dust ever so rarely, only to be disappointed.

Women are not absent from art history but have been marginalised to a borderland outside the domain reserved for men. Victorian women were in fact encouraged in creative pursuits

as long as they did not excel beyond the demure and self-effacing conduct befitting a lady. Craft was an extension of a woman's domestic duties and a socially acceptable outlet for her creativity. The Arts and Crafts Movement of the nineteenth century provided women with new opportunities for artistic practice.

Craft has not always occupied a lowly position. The ideological split between fine art and craft transpired during the Renaissance when intellectual activity was esteemed by learned men who dissociated themselves from the manual aspects of the guilds in deference to academic instruction (Lucie-Smith 1981, p. 11). Craft has had a diverse history, enjoying periods of esteem. Embroidery enjoyed a high status during the Middle Ages when a woman's needlework skills were the embodiment of virtue and gentility. Samplers, which I use as a feminine icon in my work (see Chapter Five), were a popular pastime and instructive tool bearing moral truisms of the day designed to shape a young girl's behaviour. Needlework became a way for a mother to control her daughter's socialisation and domestic training. The sampler was not so much a lesson in skill as one in femininity.

Because of its association with women, themselves dissociated from intellectuality, embroidery was deemed 'women's work', manual work devoid of all superior intellectual or creative activity. Roszika Parker asserts: '... embroidery and a stereotype of femininity have become collapsed into one another, characterised as mindless, decorative and delicate; like the icing on the cake, good to look at, adding taste and status, but devoid of significant content ...' (1984, p. 6).

In reaction against the hierarchical canons of art, feminist historians such as Parker and Pollock have declared the value of women's needlework, acclaiming embroidery as an emblem of women's cultural heritage. In doing so they reject the distinction separating craft from art and call for reassessment of the value systems that denigrate the feminine pursuits of needle and thread: 'In the face of trivialisation, it has been important to validate women's domestic labour ... and the craft traditions. These areas are important for women's sense of themselves and their past' (Parker & Pollock 1981, p. 158).

Women's expression through their domestic crafts is not new but in recent decades art theorists have written at length about the political dimension of women's craftwork. Their samplers, embroideries, quilts and banners have been, sometimes quietly, sometimes radically, subverting established canons. These crafted objects embody the gamut of woman's experiences, her memories, pains and joys. She has made herself the subject of her own discourse and people are listening.

Since the 1970s there has been renewed interest in domestic craft. Today an increasing number of artists recognise the limitless potential in traditional craft techniques and materials. While there may always be prejudices, there has been a reassessment of what was traditionally considered 'women's work' and once again craft is enjoying a more eminent status. A reaction against Pop Art's preoccupation with the mass culture of consumerism, the craft renaissance of the 1970s resulted from historical and cultural research by feminists in an attempt to extricate the marginal and trivialised for consideration in mainstream art discourse and a desire to return to the virtuosity of the handmade (eds Attfield & Kirkham 1989, p. 2). Judy Chicago's interdisciplinary *The Dinner Party* (1974-79) (Figure 1) challenged established value systems and fuelled the art/craft debate. The 1990s saw craft revitalised once again as a rejection of the egocentric greed and the economic intemperance of the 1980s.



Figure 1: Judy Chicago, Installation view, Wing Two from *The Dinner Party*, 1979, embroidery on linen and china paint on porcelain, Elizabeth A Sackler Center for Feminist Art, collection of the Brooklyn Museum.

The crafted object is a persuasive reminder of traditional skills and values that can become lost in a culture of slick technology and mass consumption. Curator David McFadden claims that this renaissance of interest in the handmade is a way of getting back in touch with materiality. He states: 'In a world where the clinical and impersonal nature of digital technologies may perplex and discourage us ... what can restore our connection to

community, to our history, and to our shared aspirations is the sense of hand' (2007, p. 8). Working with such materials and techniques provides me with an opportunity to engage with the tactile sensuality of surfaces and the delight of creating something by hand. In an age of technological supremacy the lure of manual virtuosity becomes particularly enticing. There is an intimacy in these processes, a re-engagement with the 'personal' in a modern world where technology can erase the human touch.

Artists now exploiting materials and processes traditionally associated with craft include Fiona Hall, Ilka White, Suzumi Noda (Figure 2), Rosemary O'Rourke, Freddie Robins, Anne Farren and Dave Cole (Figure 3). These are all contemporary artists who have used domestic craft techniques such as knitting, sewing, lace making and weaving to fulfil their artistic intent. The past five decades have seen an increase in practitioners using a diverse range of craft techniques in innovative ways to articulate the same broader social, cultural and political issues that concern contemporary artists. In doing so they lay bare common ground between art and craft as a means of creative expression. Work created at this junction signifies a change in visual art culture, indicating some collapse in established classifications.

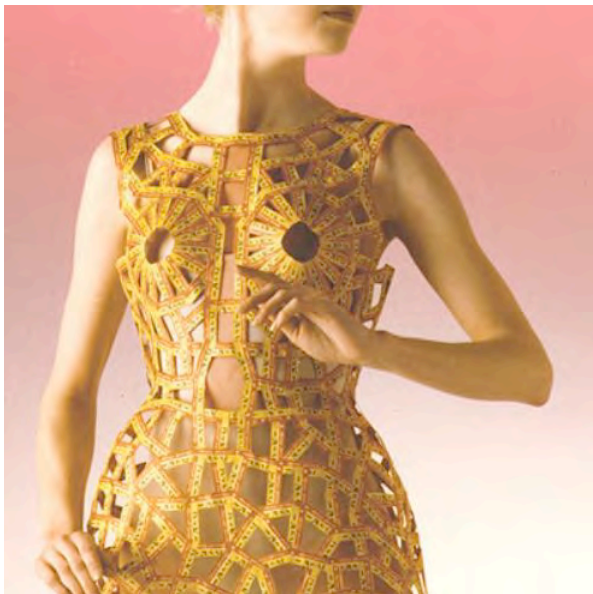


Figure 2: Suzumi Noda, *Doll in restricted clothing*, 1995, clothing labels, dimensions variable.



Figure 3: Dave Cole, *Knit Lead Teddy Bear*, 2006, lead, 15.2 x 14 x 11.4 cm., Judi Rotenberg Gallery, Boston.

Craft has emerged from the hobbyist's domain into the gallery and the museum. Artists are engaging in the subversive use of craft to undermine not only aesthetic hierarchies but also bring about social and political change. The current Craftivism movement that combines craft

and activism includes a wave of practitioners enlisting craft techniques to voice their opinions and effect change.

By exploiting the material and expressive potential inherent in craft I can activate the marginal, the trivial and kitsch. Recurrent feminine motifs in my work, such as sewing, embroidery, knitting, crochet, weaving and lace making, form a lexicon to be synthesised into constructs that, like beauty, can be delicate, ephemeral and vulnerable. Using stitching and embellishment as mutational tools, the humble strawberry becomes a shock of menstrual blood or an intricate swathe of cerise lace, the modest doily becomes the delicate couture of a woman's clandestine undergarment.

Craft materials and processes possess tacit and persuasive languages, fertile with symbolic possibilities. The network of interweaving threads intrinsic to many craft practices is an evocative signifier of the far-reaching scope of these approaches. Exploitation of this rich potential allows for successful interplay at the art/craft boundary and challenges stereotypes. It is my intention to transform often trivialised and mute craft objects and materials into articulate constructs.

Associated with traditions of ornamentation, functionality, domesticity, heredity and family, craft holds the indelible mark of human experience. National Gallery of Australia curator Robert Bell states: '... the practices of craft exist as signs of achievement and personal narratives that can relocate us in time, place and experience' (2005, p. viii). Artists working within the craft tradition pay homage to a wealth of human history by honouring processes '... that have been part of human culture for centuries...' (McFadden 2007, p. 6). Whilst exploring craft's potential inherent in this materiality I retain the integrity of processes that are signifiers of gender, community and custom. Can these inherently intimate materials be woven into a narrative that speaks of memory, physicality and identity?

CHAPTER TWO

Pattern Piece C – Interfacing – Cut 2: The boundary as metaphor

Exploring the Interface centres on the concept of negotiating boundaries and how this intercession can become a metaphor for personal identity. My position at the interface between fine art and craft symbolises my negotiation not simply of the boundary between art and craft but also a range of boundaries that constitute the frayed edges of my inner and outer worlds. My work calls into play the concept of margins and how I negotiate those borderlands as I come to grips with my own femininity, subjectivity and corporeality.

In positioning myself, I was also confronted with the task of positioning the project. On numerous occasions throughout my research I was asked to categorise my practice. Past work has been realised through printmaking, but these processes do not play a role in my current work. Similarly, while dealing with traditional craft materials and processes, I do not perceive my work as textile. The classification of my work seemed laden with complications, defying taxonomy.



Figure 4: Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Venus of the Rags*, 1967, 1974, marble and textiles, dimensions variable, Tate Modern.

A focus on commonplace objects, hybridism, installation and ephemerality highlights parallels with the Arte Povera movement of the 1960s and 1970s (refer Figure 4). I am absorbed by the Povera artists' focus, not only on expanding the gamut of art media, but also on the simple application of humble materials. Such lyrical simplicity that flies in the face of technology resonates with my handcrafted forms, prosaic objects and vulnerable or ephemeral installations. Arte Povera affirms a place for my work that does not fit neatly anywhere else. Richard Flood and Frances Morris write of Arte Povera:

Art could be made from anything ... Art could be made in any way. It could be painted, handcrafted, industrially produced, gestured, spoken, written, acted, filmed, dreamed. It might exist as an object for time immemorial or as a momentary time-based action (2001, p. 15).

According to Germano Celant, Arte Povera aimed at reformulating the object, using art practices that subverted the commodity of form and established canons, overcoming the barriers dividing 'art' and 'life' (Lumley 2004, p. 15). Through these subversions the concept of the boundary and the renegotiation of various established systems emerge. While I wish my objects to honour traditional craft techniques, I also desire for them a repositioning away from the craft object. My work relies on the recontextualisation of commonplace materials and objects in paradoxical ways, contradicting their innate qualities. Deconstruction through splitting the seams of the obvious wide open allows the object to be re-read. The selection and positioning of those materials establishes a new symbolic order.

Simultaneously, I do not want to rely on the common strategy of many museums and galleries which (perhaps with the best of intentions) showcase the craft object as they would the sculpture, painting or artefact. I do not want my objects captives of a cabinet of curiosities but desire instead a space created as much by the objects within that space as by the walls that define its outer limits. Robert Lumley states:

For the [Arte Povera] artists, space and place were above all concerned with the relationship of the 'virtual space' of the work and the 'real space' of the gallery or site ... this relationship underwent a series of radical transformations. The artwork changed in a number of respects as the traditional distinction between painting and sculpture gave way to hybrid solutions, installations and mixed media work. Ephemeral and time-based works also challenged the dominance of the fixed object (2004, p. 20).

Here the concept of the 'hybrid solution' suggests a means of negotiating various boundaries and a point of collapse in traditional classifications of the art object. The interface between art and craft becomes a crucial point of interchange. Janis Jefferies explores Jacques Derrida's classification of genre from his essay *The Law of Genre* which suggests a counter-law to the law of purity, that of contamination (ed. Mitchell 2000, p. 44). Derrida refers to it as 'a sort of participation without belonging – a taking part in without being part of ...' (1980, p. 59). By undermining the boundaries that define conventional practice, the rigid demarcation between one kind of practice and another becomes untenable. Jefferies suggests that this opens up the possibility for hybridised approaches defying categorisation and modifying the vernacular of visual language (ed. Mitchell 2000, p. 44). The hybrid form challenges many hierarchical structures and lays itself open to a range of coded meanings that can



Figure 5: Fiona Hall, *Medicine bundle for the non-born child*, 1993, aluminium, rubber, dimensions variable, Queensland Art Gallery.

contaminate and cross-pollinate the signifier. When a crafted or domestic object becomes art, when it is used to produce meaning, when it becomes a signifier, as in Anne Wilson's heirloom linens or Fiona Hall's knitted baby clothes (Figure 5), or Meret Oppenheim's iconic fur teacup, then stereotypes, preconceptions and canons are subverted. By deconstructing the domestic object my work closes the gap between studio and home. My allusion to the past and to the women in my family establishes historical, social, economic and political connections between my work and 'women's work', thus bringing to bear an exchange between the production of art and the day-to-day artefact of the domicile.

London artist Freddie Robins (McFadden 2007, p. 26) identifies knitting as an ideal instrument for challenging the boundaries between art and traditional craft practice. She explores this borderland with the object of undermining the viewer's preconceptions of knitting as the province of the tea-cosy-wielding, stray-cat-collecting grandmother. Robbins challenges comfortable domestic associations of craft by rephrasing the presumably passive and mute domestic activity of knitting. Her knitted garb and installations intersect social and political issues to engage the viewer in dialogues that can be both humorous and disconcerting. Her invented items of clothing call into play the language of what we wear,

evoking connotations of protection and constriction as well as the ever-present intimation of corporeality and the body.

The garment is a metaphor in itself for some of the boundaries I explore, an aspect I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Four. As an outer skin for our bodies it is the membrane that separates us from the outside world, the interface that stands between inner and outer, our psychical and physical entities. It can be the threshold between the identity that we present to the world and those more private dimensions we keep for ourselves.

Concerned with the boundary between art and life, the domicile emerged as a possible site for my work. Although the gallery space remains a framing mechanism for my work, I question the dispassionate surface of the white wall within the gallery context. The work is meant to evoke a domestic space, thereby closing the distance between life and art. Intended to carry the stain of human occupancy in all its pedestrian banality, the work calls to mind the accumulated lint and detritus of those shameful corners, the carelessly discarded garment perhaps still warm, the stuffed-full clutter of a world that is life's third drawer. As Wim Beeren noted, 'an exhibition ... should be no more – and, above all, no less – than a “situation” ' (Lumley 2004, p.

21). In *Exploring the Interface* the installations evoke domestic rooms rather than gallery spaces. Like Louise Bourgeois' *Cells* cluttered with memory objects, Doris Salcedo's furniture-filled chambers (Figure 6) or Magdalena Bors' mystical realms that emerge from ordinary domestic spaces (Figure 7), the work inverts the hierarchical structure that privileges the well-travelled realm of the public gallery over the intimacy of the floorboards and Persian rugs of our own private domain. Thus, the paradigm of value is shifted. The viewer is positioned as intimate participant, voyeur or guest, rather than detached spectator.

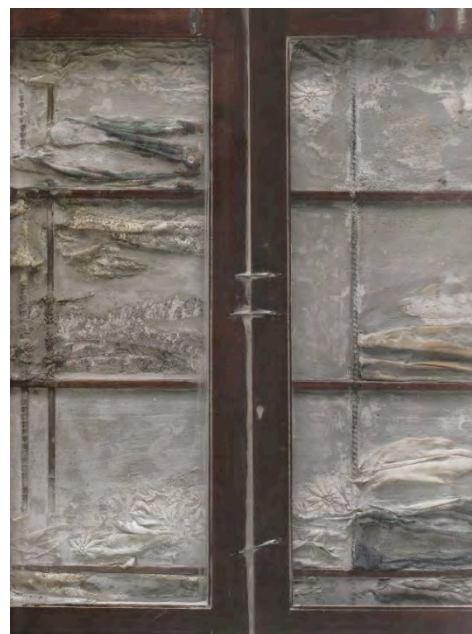


Figure 6: Doris Salcedo, *Untitled*, 1995, wood, concrete, cloth, glass, steel, 162 x 99.5 x 37 cm, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York.

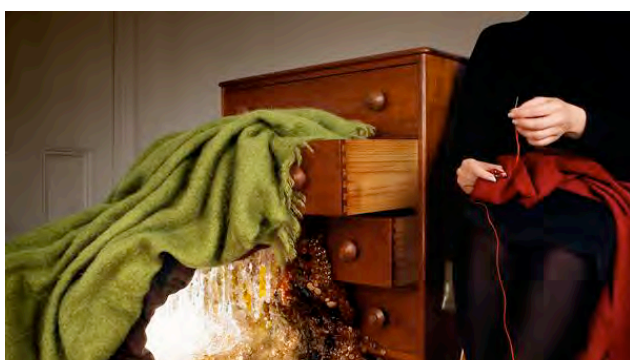


Figure 7: Magdalena Bors, *Cavern*, 2007, pigment print, 70 cm x 70 cm, Off the Kerb Gallery, Melbourne.

My work traverses paths between various dichotomous relationships

exploiting the tensions of these liminal positions that can often result from a combination of binary opposition and shared signification. It unpicks the seams of these oppositional relationships and gathers up the broken threads to weave a personal narrative that explores my psychical and physical positions. The self is a construct of both public and private worlds, formed from societal input as well as the inner workings of our psyche, shaped by our inner and outer environments. Janis Jefferies highlights a correlation between the self and the edge, offering a metaphor for our defining margins:

An *edge* denotes a border, verge, boundary, frontier, margin, brink or limit ... or a ridge where surfaces meet. The cut edges of some fabrics are particularly prone to fraying, thus running the risk of causing a falling apart at the seams or at the points of intricacy in the making up of the cloth. The same can be said of selves, or of other identities for which boundaries serve both to protect and form allegiances (ed. Mitchell 2000, p. 11).

In this project the interface has emerged as a device that strengthens or shores up the boundary between two surfaces, spaces or entities, symbolising the fortification of the self's vulnerable edges that threaten to unravel.

In questioning my gender construct I have grappled with negotiating the social borderland I occupy, the interface of my inner and outer worlds. The process of making has made me more aware of my identity and gender construct. The act of working with cloth and thread becomes a metaphor in itself. Beyond the meditative rhythms of stitching, the remembering and forgetting that occurs while you work, is the process of constructing and deconstructing. You sew, you unpick and the marks of your actions are always visible. These threads become the things holding us together, the clothes we sew for ourselves, the monogrammed initials of another's careless stitches, the steadfast cotton name tag sewn permanently into our skin by our mothers. My work has become a voicing of my 'feminine', my unique experience of my evolving gender.

Studio-led research commenced with a consideration of objects, materials and pursuits associated with craft and femininity that soon led me down the rabbit hole of my childhood. School came flooding back to me in a torrent of memories. Bean-filled frog toys cut from violent green gabardine hand-stitched by awkward ten-year-old fingers. Frustrated boys looking longingly out windows, yearning instead for the game of rough and tumble. Girls

exuding understated smugness, quietly aware, even at this age, of the role society had appointed them.

Secondary school brought with it more pronounced gender delineation. The 1980s curriculum in country Queensland was strongly gender specific. Students exited the school gates on Friday afternoons, girls cradling still-warm Pyrex casserole dishes full of macaroni and cheese, boys sporting handcrafted wooden spice racks; all, it seemed, was natural and right with the world. Never resentful of my time spent in the kitchen, I loved to cook, sew and knit, but I was keenly aware of the lack of boys around me.

At thirteen, in some odd rite of passage, girls and boys were separated. To this day I do not know what the boys did one day a week but the girls entered the sacred realm of mothercraft. For one session a week we were introduced to our role as the bearers of life. I had looked forward to this activity with anticipation and excitement. The accompanying scrapbooks my two elder sisters compiled were exquisite tomes, lovingly illustrated with precisely excised pictures from magazines and wrapping paper, decorated with glitter in alternating themes of pink and blue, that beckoned to a young girl promising the beautiful world of maternity. I believed that with this wisdom would come the appropriate maternal instincts that had eluded me thus far. This would be my lesson in how to be a woman. But, instead of enlightenment, I felt only the bitter sting of disparity and isolation. For the first time in my life I became acutely aware that there were social expectations of my gender and that I had no intention of meeting them.

CHAPTER THREE

Cut from the Same Cloth: Exploring the mother/child dyad

While exploring concepts of identity I became interested in the role of the mother/daughter relationship in shaping my own femininity. My inherited craft skills facilitated an investigation of my maternal relationships and how these associations contributed to my identity and gender construct. Many psychoanalytic and object-relations theories suggest that subjectivity is formed with the rejection of the mother. This affords a greater understanding of my ambivalent maternal relationship. I traverse the borderland of the child/mother dyad, hovering at this antagonistic and reparative disjuncture, tormented by a desire to disconnect from the maternal and an undeniable bond with the one who gave me life.

This ambiguous state is explored by object-relations theorist Melanie Klein (Doane & Hodges 1992, p. 10) who identifies two crucial phases in child-development: the 'paranoid-schizoid position', defined by a need to symbolically destroy the mother followed by anguish and remorse; and the 'depressive position', characterised by an innate readiness to love and repair the maternal object. Klein explains that this position is never resolved and therefore we are never completely done with the mother.

DW Winnicott has a similar but more romanticised view of child-development, adding that maternity is a biological instinct reflected in the female child's play with dolls (Doane & Hodges 1992, p. 19). My reading of Winnicott did nothing to allay my feelings of difference. I am troubled by his doll reference (I did not play much with dolls) and bewildered by the transcripts from his 1950s radio broadcasts outlining his maternal paradigm. Assertions such as the following left me confounded:

'You' are a woman and 'the beauty of it is that you do not have to be clever, and you do not even have to think if you do not want to'. What you are doing is 'real' and 'natural.' It has led you to give up all other interests (Doane & Hodges 1992, pp. 23-24).

These broadcasts took place, coincidentally, when my mother was a young woman embarking on her journey as wife and mother. Not that she would have heard these broadcasts but they say much about the social climate of the time.

Subsequently I was impelled to incorporate portions of these broadcasts into my work *Restrained Memory* (Figure 8). Pertinent tracts relating to the bonding process of breastfeeding were embroidered onto sturdy cotton foundation garments. The clarity of text and the bodily implication of the garment are intended to evoke the cultural imperative of motherhood. The proximity of this garment simultaneously alludes to the intimacy of the maternal relationship and the constriction of obligation.



Figure 8: Sue Jackson, *Restrained Memory* (including detail), 2011, vintage cotton bra, thread, dimensions variable.

Renee Baert (ed. Deepwell 1998, p. 176) explores Sigmund Freud's identification of female subjectivity as problematic because of the difficulty women have separating from their mothers, with whom they identify closely. Freud posits the phallus as a signifier of the separation and individuation required for the formation of subjectivity. Without a penis, a woman's subjectivity is structured around the lack or absence of a symbolic signifier. Baert cites Luce Irigaray who insists that the non-existence that signifies woman – and which inevitably infects the mother-daughter relationship – leaves women in a state of dereliction (ed. Deepwell 1998, p. 177). In this position women occupy either the role of object (of desire) or vessel (mother).

In my work *Primordial Vessel* (2011) (Figure 9) I aimed to create tension between the paradoxical conditions of maternity and infertility. Icons of fertility spill from an expectant vessel in a cascade that swings between lush fecundity and futile waste. The innocuous fillings of eggs hint at the redundancy of the otherwise fertile motifs.

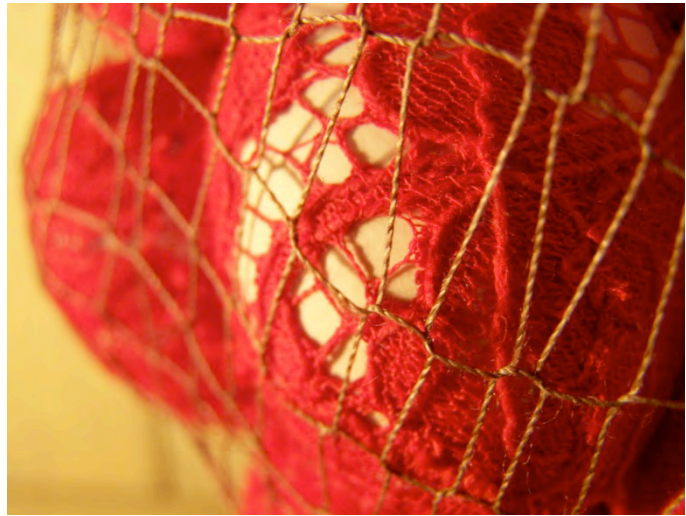


Figure 9: Sue Jackson, *Primordial Vessel* (including detail), 2011, thread, vintage lace, egg shells, dimensions variable.

Nancy Chodorow (Doane & Hodges 1992, p. 38) explores the maternal relationship, also claiming that sexual difference allows for a son's easier dislocation from the maternal whereas a daughter finds individuation more troublesome. Chodorow writes at length about the specific relationship between mother and daughter: 'In this relational account of female identity many feminists have found the basis for a specifically female poetics that dramatises the fusion and separation of mother and daughter' (Doane & Hodges 1992, pp. 42-43). I allude to this relationship in my work through the juxtaposition of various pairs throughout my installation. Gloves along with garments and shoes of varying size reside together in constructs of mother and daughter. Chodorow's work holds sway with me, going some way towards gathering up the threads of my frayed self and providing some rationalisation for ambivalent feelings.

Julia Kristeva (Doane & Hodges 1992, pp. 65-66) agrees that all children must reject the mother in order to form a healthy subjectivity and that females find this task much more difficult than males. She equates this separation with metaphorically murdering the mother. This dead mother becomes a dysfunction of the woman until she is liberated by her own pregnancy, fulfilling the final stage in her femininity – her reproductive providence. True achievement and happiness comes only with the *jouissance* of motherhood.

My reading of Kristeva did nothing but reinforce my feelings of marginalisation. Childless by both conscious choice and biological determination, I was pushed to the periphery once again. If I were to survive (psychologically) my only choices were to ignore Kristeva

altogether or to read into her theory the escape clause of artistic production (or similar) as a surrogate for childbearing. In fact many of the psychoanalytic and object-relations theories become problematic for me, for if followed, I would be positioned as a dysfunctional, paranoid psychopath. I believe instead they provide firstly an opportunity for self-examination and, as Doane and Hodges suggest, an occasion for close scrutiny of overbearing theories that have either reinforced a patriarchal culture or done little to dispute it (1992, p. 78). My position on the ledge begins to look less precarious as the vertigo subsides.

John Lechte identifies Kristeva's process of separation from the mother as essential to the formation of the ego. Kristeva also recognises it as a process tarnished by psychic pain and the vacuity of loss where there was once the comforting nurturance of union with the mother (eds Fletcher & Benjamin 1990, p. 29). These feelings reverberate on into adulthood and manifest themselves in my art. Here the mother becomes an ambivalent symbol hovering at the threshold between oneness and separation; between holding on and letting go, she embodies both nurturer and aggressor. This process of separation appears to be unconscious, an instinctive action on behalf of the child. Although it makes sense to us now, we have no recollection of this stage of our burgeoning egos. But what if this process were repeated consciously as an adult? Does such metacognitive awareness result in the production of art? This developmental process culminates in the child entering the realm of language, becoming a speaking being able to define self. Similarly, by exploring the body's psychical and physical boundaries, can I adopt a symbolic position through *visual* language? Just as Kristeva's child negotiates the spaces between subject and object, I explore some of the binary relationships that contribute to my identity.

Considering the work of women artists who explore the experience of motherhood, such as Lindsay Obermeyer and Kay Lawrence, I cannot help feeling like the only non-English-speaking person in the room. Besides the common human denominators – joy, sorrow, pain, fear – I cannot relate. Obermeyer explores the relationship between mother and daughter through textile-based works that draw from the traditional processes of knitting. Obermeyer's *Encircled* (1997) (Figure 10) is an exaggerated sweater that joins two jumpers into one corpus, a perpetual loop bonding mother and daughter. This artwork raises '... questions that circulate around psychic boundaries, split subjectivities and the psychic residue of the complex negotiation for the feminine subject of her separation from the ... maternal object' (Jefferies 2001, p. 13).



Figure 10: Lindsay Obermeyer, *Encircled*, 1997, knitted mohair, 50.8 cm x 48.3 cm (x 2) with 213.4 cm sleeves.

I have never been a mother nor felt the instinct to which many women refer, that desire, either deep and eternal or slight and passing, to be a mother. I have but one foundation for connection, the indisputable position of daughter. The work of Barbara Hanrahan therefore provides a closer parallel with my position. Choosing not to have children, Hanrahan instead poured all her energy into her work. The ever-present mother (or grandmother) in her etchings speaks of the maternal relationship depicting the love, tenacity and sacrifice of the mother from the perspective of a childless daughter. They also tell of the strong generational and communal bond between women.

During production of my own work my mother became an indispensable source of objects, materials and information. Needing more buttons, I called on my mother, the eternal hoarder, knowing she would have copious jars of them. She took on the role with enthusiasm. A parcel arrived promptly, crammed with buttons of various kinds. Each type was categorised, encased in a zip-lock bag accompanied by a written description and explanation of origin. What struck me as particularly significant was her immediate liaison with a network of friends. Her reaction to the task was to contact other women for advice, information and reassurance. From the women in the community she gleaned information about the history and significance of various types of buttons. Proud of these pieces of information, she was pleased to provide me with some factual morsel that might assist. I do not know how accurate this information is but it does not really matter. What is more important is the manifestation of the sisterhood and solidarity that exists between women, the enactment of

community and history – a sense of ownership and responsibility for those things that define our gender, those things to be passed on from one generation to another, mother to daughter. When I needed wooden cotton spools my mother again flew into action, unwinding hundreds of metres of thread to provide me with naked reels. The network of local ladies was activated once more to donate to my artistic cause. It is important that my mother and I can have this connection, albeit a simple one. It is some small common ground that unites us, if only momentarily, in time.

I occupy the ambivalent position of one who desires a mother who fulfils all the social determinations of maternity, yet subverts the cultural obligation of motherhood herself. I yearn for the maternal archetype but simultaneously lament her lost opportunities and unrealised dreams. I also mourn the maternal void that may only be filled when I can empathise with my mother's condition by becoming a mother myself. In negotiating this position I am keenly aware of the weight of social judgement. Although I function outside the boundaries of motherhood, I am still contained within the borders that partition gender roles. Despite biological impossibility I am constantly urged to adopt or foster as if motherhood was an imperative to be met at all costs.



Figure 11: Sue Jackson, *Hysterics Bower* (including detail), 2011, vintage lace, thread, egg shells, rabbit fur, glue, organic nest matter, dimensions variable.

The mother is ever-present in my work. It is her shoes that tower above those of the child in *Stepping Out* (2011) (Figure 27), her voice of wisdom or judgement uttered in *It's Not You!*

(2010-11) (Figure 15) and *Truisms* (2010-11) (Figure 25), her body that houses the fertile surplus in *Primordial Vessel* (2010-11) (Figure 9), *Hysterics Bower* (2011) (Figure 11) and *Surfeit* (2011) (Figure 14). Mothers are meant to personify the intrinsic qualities of nurturance, tolerance, endurance and love. The maternal object made material in my work is somewhat more inscrutable, perhaps because she is an amalgam of all the mothers in my life. She is also me. She is teacher, warden, nurse, tyrant. She stumbles and falters but always maintains her balance on the precipice that she negotiates between her inner and outer worlds, between culture and nature, between what is expected of her and what is inside her.

CHAPTER FOUR

Scraps, Off-cuts and Remnants: Exploring the corporeal

This chapter addresses the interconnected concepts of corporeality, the body and identity. I exploit material vulnerability and ephemerality as a metaphor for the impermanence of the body and explore materials and garments as bodily surrogates and metaphoric representations of the physical and psychical boundaries of self. I also examine theories of abjection as a means of exploring these liminal spaces.

René Baert asserts that 'Few objects... have the mnemonic force and bodily aura of clothing: it is the very tissue between self and the social, the psychic and social boundaries' (ed. Mitchell 2000, p. 3). The garment first appeared in my work as an embodiment of the childhood memory of my mother donning layers of resolute undergarments, building to an ultimate husk. In a way she was piecing together an identity, one that I now understand was partly constructed for her by the social constraints of her gender.

The identification of gender through a simple garment such as a petticoat or slip became a paradigm to follow. Cloth and clothing are embedded with a range of historical, cultural and personal significances. I rely on the site of my work (both the domestic space and the garment) being predetermined, already entangled in a system of implications. My choice of objects and garments derives from culturally and mnemonically inherited stereotypes of gender. These are the commonplace, the undergarments of a woman's day-to-day existence, the trappings of her reality. They are metaphors for my identity. They are pattern pieces to be stitched together into a gendered garment, leaving my fingers bleeding from the pinpricks suffered in the making.

The garment can not only stand for the body and the psyche, but can also carry a history symbolically embedded in fabric that possesses the potential to tell real stories of the known as well as imagined stories of the unknown. When selecting and working with garments – handling, smelling, washing and stitching – I engage with them on a sensory level. In this way I can dwell in their memory, calling to mind not only the implication of another's life, narrative and body but also my own body, inciting a kind of corporeal awareness.

Gloves emerged in my work as a means of exploring aspects of the body, gender and identity. The inside of a glove receives little attention yet plays an integral part in the experience of wearing a glove and the sensuous act of slipping it on or off. The glove suggests introspection,

its interior becoming a metaphor for inward delving or withholding what you do not want seen or known. The insides of my gloves are embellished with incongruous lining that invites the investigation of touch and smell and alludes to some secret, sacred interior.



Figure 12: Meret Oppenheim, *Déjeuner en Fourrure*, 1936, fur-covered cup, saucer, and spoon, cup 10.9 cm in diameter; saucer 23.7 cm in diameter; spoon 20.2 cm long, overall height 7.3 cm, Museum of Modern Art.



Figure 13: Sue Jackson, glove from *Fits Like a Glove* series (including detail), 2010, vintage glove, rabbit fur, thread, dimensions variable.

My lined gloves clearly reference Meret Oppenheim's iconic fur-covered demitasse, *Déjeuner en Fourrure* (1936) (Figure 12). Oppenheim's work has been assaulted by a code of signification and I am aware that my objects sit in the wake of a range of established readings

and subtexts beyond my control. A dominant reading of this work is as a Freudian fetish object: the fur becomes pubic hair, the cup a vagina and the act of drinking mirrors oral sex. My *Fits Like a Glove* series (2011) (Figure 13 & Figure 20) references female sexual or reproductive organs hanging limp to evoke a sense of impotence, loss and emptiness but also an air of anticipation and promise of fulfilment.

The psychoanalytic and feminist writings of theorists such as Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray have informed artistic practice since the 1970s, giving rise to the body-based artwork. Kristeva's theories on the abject are useful as a source of metaphoric representation. Elizabeth Gross (eds Fletcher & Benjamin 1990, p. 86-87) summarises Kristeva's theory of abjection, explaining that healthy subjectivity is formed by the expulsion of the improper, unclean and disorderly element of one's corporeal existence. The abject normally takes the form of substances that enter and leave our bodies in the course of our various bodily cycles. Kristeva also claims that these things are never fully expelled from our selves but are held at bay, lingering on the borderlands of our social identity. I am drawn to the liminal aspects of the abject as a means of exploring notions of the physical and emotional body. Elizabeth Grosz (1994, pp. 192-193) explores the polarised positions of inside and outside, identifying the abject as belonging to both and suggesting that we occupy the perilous interface between the two until death pushes us beyond this threshold.



Figure 14: Sue Jackson, *Surfeit* (including detail), 2011, cotton crochet, thread, dehydrated strawberries, dimensions variable.

While my strawberry objects do not embody the typically abject such as faeces, vomit and urine, they do reference blood and inescapable materiality. In *Surfeit* (2011) (Figure 14) strawberries portray the abject as a shock of menstrual blood. This visceral stain marks the

feminine, the excess that escapes. The undergarment is encoded feminine by its lacy adornment and the physical sign of 'other'.

An introspective meditation has led to the recognition of the abject as not only my bodily residue of fertility but also my psyche's rejection of maternity. No longer able to expel my reproductive waste I have found an alternative means of symbolically vanquishing the unwanted and unnecessary. The egg, as a manifestation of the abject, is both rejected from and embraced by my body in an attempt to reconcile my physical and psychical self. My eggs have been pushed to the edge of this symbolic threshold. Unwilling to embrace these objects yet unable to fully renounce them, they occupy a tangible position on display. Symbolically they waver between acceptance and rejection, desire and denial, swinging between letting go and holding on, discretion and confession. The egg changes significance as it sways between inside and outside. Inside the body it is a condition of fertility, generation and potential, outside the body it becomes a symbol of death and waste.



Figure 15: Sue Jackson, *It's not you!* (including detail), 2011, human hair, cotton thread, dimensions variable.

My work with hair eventuated when I discovered that the seemingly endless amount of hair I retrieved from the bath drain had a propensity for forming delicate, lace-like spheres. Their surface so closely resembled fabric that it invited stitching. As a child, my mother dictated the length and style of my hair. Never allowed long hair, I felt masculated and was even occasionally mistaken for a boy. Years later the manipulation of my hair became not only a means of rebellion but also a way of defining my femininity. *It's Not You!* (2011) (Figure 15) continues this self-defining process.



Figure 16: Bron Fionnachd-Féin, *Untitled*, 2002, silk thread and artist's hair, hand stitched.

My use of hair references the work of artists including Mona Hatoum, Carson Fox, Louiseann Zahra and Bron Fionnachd-Fein (Figure 16) but perhaps most closely aligns to the work of Anne Wilson. There are several parallels between Wilson's work and my own: a fellow scrounger, Wilson garners heirloom linens from a variety of sources, she

invokes the domestic exploiting the mnemonic power of intimate objects and spaces, her use of cloth and hair references the body and touch, she alludes to the abject and elicits notions of sexuality.

Much of my work is intended to engage on a sensory level beyond the visual, allowing the viewer to access a range of senses and thus enabling a more comprehensive mode of knowing. Alison Ferris states that '... touch, or even the invitation to touch, is iconoclastic because it is the symbolic act that can breach the carefully constructed gap between the object (the physical) and the mind (Jefferies 2001, p. 42). There is an intimacy in Wilson's work – such as *Lost* (1998) (Figure 17) – that echoes my own. Both rely on furniture or the domestic construct rather than the wall in order to stage work. The viewer is enticed to reside with the work, facilitating a more open path to memory and material recollections.

A more direct correlation with the body can be seen in Wilson's *Mendings* (1995) (Figure 18), consisting of embellished holes in the collars and cuffs of clothing. These hairy holes, reminiscent of my own fur-lined objects, evoke the orifices, folds and fissures from which the abject issues, sites that Lacan identifies as erogenous zones:

... structured in the form of the *rim*, which is the space between two corporeal surfaces, an interface between the inside and the outside of the body. These corporeal sites provide a boundary or threshold between what is inside the body... and what is outside the body... (eds Fletcher & Benjamin 1990, p. 88).

In *Mendings* (1995) (Figure 18), these are located at the margins of the garment, embodying the boundaries between which the private and public body hovers. Curator Lisa Tung (Hixson 2003, p. 9), claims that 'Orifices are where physical barriers break down. Boundary crossings from interiority to exteriority and the definition of a relationship between oneself and the Other are called into question at these sites'.



Figure 17: Anne Wilson, *Lost*, 1998, cloth, hair, thread, leather cord, wood chair, 91.4 x 55.9 x 59.7 cm, Revolution Gallery, Detroit.



Figure 18: Anne Wilson, *Mendings*, no. 13, 1995, cloth, hair, thread, wood and acrylic mount, 15.2 x 18.4 x 17.1 cm, private collection, New York.

I am influenced by the body-based artworks of Kiki Smith, Jana Sterbak, Mona Hatoum and Magdalena Abakanowicz. Abakanowicz's *Abakans* series (1966-75) (Figure 19) makes candid allusions to the female body's cavities, creases and ridges, evoking the slit, threshold or rim. Hovering between floor and ceiling, these colossal mantles lure the viewer into their textile folds. A comparison with my work (Figure 20) calls into question the power of scale and bombast versus the allure of intimate subtlety and exquisiteness. While the mammoth scale of Abakanowicz's objects produces a reaction through confrontation, I aim to lower the viewer's guard with seductive persuasion.



Figure 19: Magdalena Abakanowicz, *Brown Abakans*, 1969/1972, sisal weaving, 300 x 300 x 350 cm, collection of the artist.



Figure 20: Susan Jackson, glove from *Fits Like a Glove* series, 2010, vintage glove, dehydrated strawberries, thread, dimensions variable.

Individual strawberry slices sewn together into lace-like constructs provide this provocative lure. Each strawberry slice invariably approximates the heart or womb, some even forming pronounced slits reminiscent of vaginal forms. Their blush of red evokes the wound or the torn edges of flesh. Stitching these together offers a metaphor for surgery, incision and loss, the cut edge of flesh perforated, pulled and puckered by needle and thread. What also emerges is the rim. Here the border or the edge between two physical surfaces takes on significance.

Strawberries are also a metaphor for corporeality, as their organic matter inevitably deteriorates. This quality reflects the materiality of the body and its inescapable mortality. They represent the lush and fecund potential in the female body (my body) that will fade and fail with age.

The visceral works of Jana Sterbak provide a point of reference for my body-specific works using organic matter that faces the inevitable decay and transience of time. Sterbak's iconic contemporary artwork *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Anorectic Albino* (1987) (Figure 21), consisting of 23 kilograms of raw steak stitched together in a patchwork of flesh to form a simple dress, confronts the viewer with a life-size garment that closely references the body. Sterbak's flesh dress speaks of both the physical and psychical aspects of female identity, referencing archetypes of beauty and sexual desire with connotations of a 'piece of meat' (Jefferies 2001, p. 15). While not carrying the same degree of perverse abjection, my work aims to symbolise the ageing woman, her loss of vitality and fertility, and her degeneration from the socially constructed ideals of youth, beauty and fecundity.



Figure 21: Jana Sterbak, *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic*, 1987, flank steak, mannequin, salt, thread, dress size 38, Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis.



Figure 22: Susan Jackson, *Untitled*, 2011, dehydrated strawberries, thread, plastic mould, 16 x 10 x 9 cm.

Sterbak's work cites the historical Vanitas paintings that served as moral lessons in the impermanence of human life, the fleeting nature of earthly pursuits and the dangers of the lusts of the flesh. Such moralistic rebukes are not my intention but I do aim for a conceptual link between the ephemerality of materials and the inevitable mortality of the body. My focus is not on death but on the mortal failings of my own body as it lets me down, falling apart at the seams.

Just as the abject threatens the margins of what is socially acceptable, my work taunts various imposed limits. It airs dirty linen and opens some drawers of unmentionables in an attempt to traverse some of my personal boundaries. Lush surfaces and embellishment (Figure 22) are seductive but more considered reading of the work reveals the allure of an intimate treatment of the body that asks the audience to make whatever bodily associations their personal experience and psyche will naturally permit.

CHAPTER FIVE

Gathering Threads: Memory and the construction of narrative

There is an intimacy in craft materials and techniques that make them persuasive tools, evocative of memories in most people who can recall a grandmother who crocheted and told stories while grandchildren sat at her feet on threadbare rugs. The allure of the craft object often lies in its familiarity and power to evoke memory and emotion by the personal associations it carries. As part of our everyday existence, we can relate to it on a very intimate level. Intimacy is also enacted by the sensory qualities of materials. Marcel Proust claims that our senses can unlock memory: ‘... taste and smell ... bear ... in the tiny and almost impalpable drops of their essence, the vast structure of recollection’ (Lehrer 2008, p. 80). Many of the materials I use have a lush quality, be it visual, tactile or olfactory, the silken feel of fur or fabric or the provocative aroma of honey, roses or fruit. Given their sensuality, these materials are inherently intimate and autobiographical, hinting at a wealth of history and evoking personal signification and recollection. The repetitive motion of craft techniques evokes the rhythms of the body, the gentle rise and fall of the chest, the ebb and flow of coursing blood and the cyclic thud of a pulse. The ritualistic repetition of stitches or knots provides a soothing, meditative pathway that enables me to reflect on instinctual memories, allowing me an inner dialogue I can extricate as an outward narrative.

As one of our most crucial senses, memory plays an important role in the inception and reception of my work which exploits the kind of memory Proust referred to as involuntary memory. Proust (Gibbons 2007, pp. 2-3) considered memory an emotional rather than intellectual activity, and an important element of the inner self. He considered involuntary memory to be spontaneous recall evoking an emotional consciousness that surpasses the intellect. Proust valued involuntary memory for its capacity to connect past and present, allowing the artist to communicate personal truths to an audience, connecting private with public.

Memory can release us on emotional flights of elation or anguish. It can be tempered for public consumption or unfettered for private gratification. It arrives by our senses or greets us in our sleep by stealth. Tacit and unspoken, explicit and plain, it sways between forgetting and remembering, repression and recollection. The ambiguous characteristics and marginal position of memory make it highly attractive to the artist. Much of my work draws upon

childhood memories that manifest as personal narratives laying bare memory traces and objects. Lived experience is a linchpin of my work, which negotiates the implications of making the private public and treads the often-precarious boundary between inner and outer worlds.



Figure 23: Susan Jackson, *Memory Slip*, 2010, buttons, nylon thread, wire, muslin, dimensions variable.

One of my first works emerged after I found an old corset my mother had given me. Retrieved from a suitcase of old clothes, I was enraptured as the perished elastic crackled and groaned upon unfolding. The yellowed fabric and rust spots represented the years that had diminished the idealism of a young woman who came to understand that marriage was not what she had hoped. Worn under her wedding dress more than fifty years before, this garment was loaded with all the hopes and aspirations of a teenage girl embarking on her new life as a young woman. This image of my mother seemed quite alien to me. My memory was of a small girl lying on her parents' bed watching a

woman dress in her best, layering sensible, functional undergarments, pantyhose, petticoat and slip. So the slip became my first feminine icon, a simple, prosaic object heavy with associations of gender. I constructed my first slip from buttons (Figure 23). These were ordinary buttons, special only in that they were given to me in large pickle jars by my mother when I left home at seventeen, a rite of passage, a domestic badge for a coming of age. In this construct the buttons become lustrous, evoking the delicacy of lace, projecting their decorative form in shadow. Constructed in such a way that each button is sewn to another, the resultant structure is a netted mesh reminiscent of the warp and weft of woven cloth. This garment also honours the memory of my father, bent over stitching meticulously to mend shoes and fishing nets, that has informed my nature as much as the domestic references from women in my life.

Wanting to exploit the symbolic potency of commonplace objects and their ability to evoke memory, I proceeded to garner objects of archetypal femininity. These included an array of sewing or craft paraphernalia such as needles and pins, buttons and zips, cotton reels, embroidery hoops, dressmaker's mannequins and patterns, scissors and thimbles. I also considered the craft materials and processes with which I possessed experience and ability, including sewing, embroidery, knitting and weaving, and others such as lace making and crochet, that I could appropriate in the form of ready-mades. A collection of fabrics, furs and fibres soon amassed.



Figure 24: Sue Jackson, installation view from exhibition *Sosueme* (including detail), 2010, acquired items, dimensions variable.

A natural proclivity for scrounging was served in various markets, second-hand and antique stores and op shops (Figure 24). Many of the objects and materials carry the scars and blemishes of time and wear. This well-worn quality alludes to a time that has passed and establishes the connection between object and memory. The hunt became part of the pleasure of making as I became aware of the countless narratives I was unearthing. Unspoken narratives told by silent voices from the past. Material is sensual and conjures sensorial memories '... because it can be touched, it has an odour, and keeps the memory of the gesture of the hands that have cut and sewn ... [it]' (Jefferies 2001, p. 27). Who were the women who crocheted these doilies, who embellished these handkerchiefs? Whose were the tiny hands that filled the kid gloves, tattered and missing buttons? Whose were the histories intimated by the marks and scuffs of time?

Searching for the object becomes an addictive and immersive pursuit. What motivates you in the hunt is the need to connect with a thing, knowing you have found that thing when it

positions you in a memory and creates some commonality relating to your own experience. Once the objects are found, I identify connections between concept and object to then gather loose threads to weave into a narrative. In a way I liken it to the maternal instinct of nesting.

Naomi Segal suggests that ‘... the most simple object will cease to be banal as it becomes marked by personal attachment ...’ (1981, p. 6). Following Proust’s theory that memories can be revived by objects of the simplest and least lyrical type such as the ordinary material trappings of our everyday reality, Segal suggests: ‘It is ... because the objects are so simple and everyday that they strike so forcibly and with a particular poignancy’ (Segal 1981, p. 27).

French literary theorist and semiotician Roland Barthes, prompted by a photograph, records a memory of his departed mother (see appendix 2) (Gibbons p. 38). It is not her likeness, the contours of her face or her countenance that evoke these memories but the clothes she wears. The garnish of a hat and the trim of a sleeve are the signs that prompt his recollection. Through a string of connections he transports himself to a site filled with signifiers, her bedroom and here his memory flourishes, swelling to include other senses where the sound of a powder box lid holds him in rapture. I have not seen the photograph to which Barthes referred nor is there a need. I know without qualification that this image would connect me with the memory of my own grandmother and in a similar fashion convey me hence to the dark enclosure of her room, the scarred and sad surface of her dressing table and the scent of loose face powder and tired perfume.

When these ordinary objects or materials are recontextualised and offered up for contemplation as art, they speak an intimate language that reaches people on a profound level. Objects are not only endowed with meaning that is deeply entrenched in social, political and historical signification, but also carry the import that we place upon them. Doane and Hodges suggest that ‘... objects both construct the subject and are constructed by it’ (1992, p. 13). The consequence of the object is thereby determined by the way we utilise, desire and garner these objects.

Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway grant agency to objects as semiotic performers able to take an active part in communication (Bolt 2004, p. 76). The commonplace objects many would consider mundane and banal are the things I consider honourable and poignant, laden with meaning and merit. I remembered that buried in my mother’s sewing room were old wooden cotton reels. These were machine-turned from inexpensive pine, nonetheless beautiful and toned warm with age. In my *Truisms* (2010-11) (Figure 25) old wives’ tales are embroidered on silk ribbon and wound around these wooden reels, to be unwound and read,

rewound and stored as a seamstress stores her threads. Such superstitions were passed on to me as 'pearls of wisdom', courtesy of my mother and grandmother. They have remained with me, earning a sentimental place amongst memories of my grandmother covering mirrors in her house during lightning storms and my mother warning against putting new shoes on the table lest it start an argument.



Figure 25: Sue Jackson, *Truisms* (including detail), 2011, silk ribbon, embroidery thread, wooden reels, dimensions variable.

These aphorisms are like silken epitaphs on tiny wooden monuments. The ribbons become the filaments of memory and the continuous threads of generations before me. These are my versions of the traditional sampler used to impart social and moral teachings to young women. By wrapping parts of my written memories around spools I am implying that our histories can be read in the events, phrases, objects and materials that we treasure.

The use of text throughout my work acts as a means of ensuring audience engagement and acknowledges the work of artists such as Barbara Kruger and Nancy Spero. I view text as a device that begs to be read and which as literate beings we are eager to consume. My use of the axiom as a means of accessing childhood memories and questioning social conditioning references the work of Jenny Holzer who explores the power of language and highlights the way clichés and social codes shape our subjectivity. Holzer's *Truisms* (1977-79) (Figure 26) challenges conformity by immersing the viewer in the maxims by which we habitually conduct our lives (Isaak 1996, p. 37). My truisms are far more absurd and rely on the viewer's discernment between truth and myth. My parody of the truism is a way of trivialising my past with warmth and good humour if not respect.



Figure 26: Jenny Holzer, *Absolute submission can be a form of freedom and you are guileless in your dreams*, golf balls from the *Truisms* series, 1977-79, letterpress, golf balls, unlimited edition.



Figure 27: Sue Jackson, *Stepping Out* (including detail), 2011, vintage lace, leather, thread, fabric stiffener, wood, shoe heels, dimensions variable.

The shoes of *Stepping out* (2011) (Figure 27) are a feminine icon and ritual object signifying a rite of passage into womanhood. As a child, my elder sister played with me as a doll, dressing me in beautiful, exotic garments of her own design and making. Satins hung expectantly on my child form and feet flip-flopped in shoes too large. My tailored shoes represent a retelling of these memories. They are the exotic trappings of a woman's wardrobe embodying all the sensuality and finesse that I simultaneously yearned for yet held at bay as I developed from

innocent child to adult. By constructing shoes out of delicate and perishable materials I am also alluding to the inevitable march of time. They embody the futility of the childhood fear of stepping forward into adulthood, as adulthood ultimately comes to us all.

I seek to create mythologies of past traumas, making them easier to face, less painful and more disconnected from the heart. The span between the memory, and the emotions associated with it, widens allowing one to repair some of the angst of earlier loss. Like my mother darning socks and my father mending fishing nets, this work restores the tattered threads of the fabric of a childhood that fell short. My process of making has a restorative effect. The slow pace and meticulous nature of my work promotes a reflective and healing state. Homage to the past requires a revisitation of the past and in some cases a return to past wounds and anxieties. Cathy Caruth (after Freud) refers to this as '... the unspeakability of trauma – the inability... of being able to fully assimilate trauma as it occurs and the need to find belated and symptomatic or allusive ways of reviving the crisis in order to remember it' (Gibbons 2007, p. 15). This body of work represents my past revisited, retold and reorganised as a means of catharsis and healing.



Figure 28: Louise Bourgeois, *Cell VII*, 1998, mixed media installation, variable, Friedrich Christian Flick Collection.

My work shows common purpose with the memorial works of Doris Salcedo, Greg Leong, Tracey Emin and Louise Bourgeois, who address the conditions of memory, loss and our relationship to others. Marie-Laure Bernadac (Bernadac & Bourgeois 1996, p. 144) cites Bourgeois' memories as the raw material for her work which she reconstructs as a means of re-enacting and exorcising the anxieties of childhood recollections. Bourgeois' prison-like *Cell* works (1989-94) (Figure 28) are constructed memory chambers portraying the anguish of childhood reminiscences: 'Furnishings and accessories gathered within the cells are orchestrated to evoke the past and the pain that is embedded in it, even without knowledge of Bourgeois' life history' (Gibbons 2007, pp. 18-19). Bourgeois, in telling the story of her own less-than-ideal childhood, establishes the shared human condition of pain and loss. Like Bourgeois I seek a retelling of my history but by creating a generic domesticity I also hope to conjure the viewer's memories.

Although Bourgeois' *Cells* are strongly referenced in my work, my rooms are intended for occupation whereas Bourgeois' rooms are designed for the viewer to look into rather than enter. Her memory objects are domestic in nature but her cells often look less like domestic spaces and more like factories or workshops. While Bourgeois' rooms reflect the awkward clutter of the unconscious mind, my rooms are more redolent of the clutter of occupancy. The woven matter of nest-like structures and the continuous thread of knots and stitches emulate the infinite network of connecting memories and narratives.

French philosopher Henri Bergson defines memory as the interface between mind and matter (1988, p. 13). His reference to matter here is crucial for it alludes to the object and its link to memory. By creating the memory work the artist has the opportunity to bridge the gap between artist and viewer, self and public. Gibbons claims that 'In performing this function, art provides a locus in which the re-cognitions and reconfigurations of memory can be communicated and shared' (2007, p. 6).

My constructs are not literal depictions of past events but suggest emotions associated with those events. The viewer is confronted by a series of dramas that play out within the domestic space. They are invited to experience the work from within an index of stored memories, associations and sensibilities. Seduced by visceral sensuality the mind deciphers as the body remembers sights, smells and textures. The viewer brings to the work their own set of experiences, in turn becoming the biographer who takes the final step in concluding the story. If but one aspect of my work transports the viewer to some past place, event or memory then I deem the work successful, as the viewer is rewarded by a willingness to enter into a dialogue with the work.

CONCLUSION

At the completion of this project, the destination is not the one I perceived for myself at the outset. Commencing as an idealistic attempt to challenge the boundaries between fine art and craft, the project soon evolved as the hard and fast stance of the soapbox gave way to the prudent balancing act of negotiating the boundaries between these two fields. What emerged from theoretical and practice-led research was an inward conversation that kept returning to a personal narrative and the relational links between the tradition of domestic craft, memory, gender, identity and the maternal relationship. These often ambivalent issues could be structured around the boundary or edge and my negotiation of these liminal positions assumed the form of the interface, the strengthening and sometimes defining agent between two entities. The interface thus emerged as a metaphor for my construction and deconstruction of ideas of self.

Studio-based and theoretical research has deepened my understanding of subject, object, narrative and meaning. It has highlighted the various contributing factors that inform my gender and identity. I have also gained a greater understanding of the interconnected roles of object, material, memory, artist and viewer in the construction of meaning and narrative. This has allowed me to formulate visual dialogue that centres on my negotiation of various boundaries and polarised binaries. This project has allowed me to revisit, reconfigure and reconcile the past in a cathartic act where the artwork assumes the role of mediator, allowing me to negotiate my position from a safe distance.

The interface, object, memory and the body are linchpins of this project, focusing on the performative aspects of these as signifiers. The work lays bare the relationship between object and subject, private and public, inside and outside, highlighting the interfacial position and the dialogue of tensions that is generated at these sites.

My installations can be seen as traces of memory and lived experience staged in a series of dramas that play out within a space. As a means of activating the gallery space and bridging the gap between life and art, I decided to forsake the walls for the day-to-day trappings of the domicile, choosing instead to stage my objects on furniture. The exhibition is structured around three domestic spaces reminiscent of a bedroom, lounge and sitting rooms. Doors are set in alternate corners, encouraging the viewer to cross one room to enter another. Intimate constructs are softly illuminated with intensity evocative of the shaded lamp or the warm glow of the dusty household globe. These staging techniques, combined with the intimate

proximity of object and subject, are enlisted as a means of encouraging the viewer to assume their role in the work.

The sensorial evocations that accompany tactility, smell, materiality, memory and the body create dramatic enactments which hopefully form a narrative resonance with the viewer. A focus on the sensory signifies a mode of knowing and a way of experiencing the artwork on a variety of levels that goes beyond the visual. Sensorial enactment affords an intimate way of relating to objects and materials that borrows from a network of sensorial memories. My choice of craft as a vehicle for such expression has its roots imbedded in my childhood, the seduction of material memory and tenacious hold of social conditioning. Domestic craft materials and processes form my lexicon. The language of the object and the poetics of metaphor allow me to communicate. Like speaking a first language, they are comfortable. This project has allowed me to discover my own language and become my own narrator.

Photography became a very useful tool in the research process as a means of documentation as well as a way of framing the object. Zoomed photographs simulated the close inspection of surfaces accentuating their tactility. Feedback and critical dialogue with supervisors and peers was beneficial in gaining understanding of the execution, resolution and reception of the work. Visual journals were also invaluable as a means of catching the frequent conceptual overspill as well as a method of documenting process. They became like a meticulous crafting of knots that forms the net of interconnected threads encasing all the supporting ideas of a central concept.

This exegesis provides some context for my work. It is bound by the unavoidable constraints of length and time but this has the virtue of leaving room for further studio research. Now at the end of things there is a welcome light at the end of the proverbial tunnel but that same light illuminates several questions that prompt further consideration. How could I transform furniture from a staging device for the object to the art object itself? Could I further exploit the relationship between the craft technique and the ephemeral to encompass far more transient materials? Could I knit, weave or make lace with water, fire or earth? Could I create an artwork comprised purely of the function of memory without tangible or physically representational form?

In the spirit of the underpinning theme of this project I have attempted to maintain a balance between honouring tradition and extending materials and processes beyond their traditional use. I have endeavoured to mobilise the mute, the often commonplace or ordinary, into an articulate device that unlocks the lyrical vernacular of object and metaphor.

Through an investigation of various oppositional binaries, hierarchies, boundaries and liminal positions, I have attempted to activate the interface. My work opens up the expressive potential of this site through the construction of narrative. I have used the interface, the edge that swings between inner and outer, as a metaphor for my negotiation of self. Intimate connections with memory can be made through an interwoven network of objects, materials, senses and the body. In negotiating these boundaries I have taken up a position at the interface or edge and asked the viewer to join me there.

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APPENDIX 1

List of exhibitions

Solo shows contributing to studio-based research:

Botanica Lingua, K & H Restaurant, Launceston, 12 January – 21 February 2009.

Archetype, Wursthause Gallery, Launceston, 4 March – 2 April 2009.

Group shows contributing to studio-based research:

Crunch, Academy Gallery, University of Tasmania, Launceston, 12 July – 9 September 2007.

Get Staffed (exhibitor and curator), The Powerhouse Gallery, Launceston, 23 – 9 November 2008.

Sosueme, Arts Alive, Launceston, 20 April – 8 May 2010.

APPENDIX 2

Extract from *Contemporary art and memory: images of recollection and remembrance*

Here, around 1913, is my mother dressed up – hat with a feather, gloves, delicate linen at wrists and throat, her ‘chic’ belied by the sweetness and simplicity of her expression. This is the only time I have seen her like this, caught in history (of tastes, fashions, fabrics): my attention is distracted from her by accessories which have perished; for clothing is perishable, it makes a second grave for the loved being. In order to ‘find’ my mother alas, and without ever being able to hold on to this resurrection for long, I must, much later, discover in several photographs the objects she kept on her dressing table, an ivory powder box (I loved the sound of its lid), a cut-crystal flagon, or also a low chair, which is now near my own bed... (Gibbons 2007, p. 38)

APPENDIX 3

Resolution of Space

The installation of my work began with the approximate placement of furniture into three rooms constructed inside the gallery. While preliminary designs were made and generally adhered to, decisions regarding the ultimate placement of furniture could only be made once the furniture and I occupied the physical space of the gallery. It was only then that issues regarding the aesthetic, cohesive, compositional and navigational aspects of the rooms truly became apparent.

When placing furniture it was my intent to strike a balance between domestic space and installation space. I was conscious of a deep-seated tendency to arrange furniture as I would in my own home, an example of the nesting tendency I reference in my exegesis. Situating pieces away from, and diagonal to, the walls created a more intimate place where the viewer is more aware of the area within the walls than the walls themselves. Smaller domestic objects, such as the floor rugs served as both structural devices that closed in the space, drawing pieces together, as well as navigational devices to guide the viewer's eye and passage through the rooms.



Figure 29: Installation of assessment, 2011. Photograph: Mark Jackson.

With furniture in place I commenced staging my crafted objects enlisting a combination of previously trialled, intuitive and experimental strategies. For example, *Surfeit II* (2011) travelled over various surfaces before it finally came to rest on the floor beside the bed. This process was repeated several times as the staged garment settled and shifted with the passage of time and viewers in the gallery. Installations of objects became fixed when intersections of colours,

shapes and surface qualities resulted in expressive incongruities or harmonies and narratives emerged.

The process of installation often called for a physical interaction with objects. Crawling into the pristine white sheets of *Surfeit I* (2011) created the human presence I was seeking and a

means of identifying a locus for the signification of that bodily presence. This intimate relationship with the work evoked a bodily awareness and agency that I believed could convey to the viewer.

The three rooms were installed concurrently. While the first two rooms took shape with relative ease, the third room proved more challenging. This was perhaps as a result of the many possible variations in sequence and layout of objects. A contributing factor may also be the lack of large imposing items of furniture, such as those present in the first two rooms, which dictate placement.

The work in this room required the most physical interaction with the highest degree of sewing, handling and placement during the staging of the installation. In this room I had the opportunity to observe pieces from all angles becoming cognisant of the form as it moved beyond the object. Before lighting was set, in the stark reality of the overhead halogens, I was already aware of the delicate lace-like apparitions that were taking shape in the shadows cast at dynamic angles upon the walls.



Figure 30: Installation of assessment, 2011.
Photograph: Mark Jackson.



Figure 31: Installation of assessment, 2011.
Photograph: Mark Jackson.

Lighting constituted the final stage of installation. I was able to achieve the quality of lighting that I had envisaged and was pleased with the outcome and effect. Darkened rooms with soft spots that illuminated staged objects and cast portentous shadows created the kind of intimate, powerful and profoundly contemplative space that I desired.

APPENDIX 4

Documentation of Exhibition

Exploring the Interface is structured around a series of interconnecting rooms. These domestic-inspired spaces evoke sites of quiet contemplation through the staging of dim interiors illuminated by subtle lighting and the gently pervasive aroma of strawberries.



Figure 32: Sue Jackson, views of first room installation (bedroom), 2011. Photograph: Jasper da Seymour.

The first room bears the unmistakable mien of the bedroom (Figure 32). The timeworn quality of furniture and dishevelled bed linen provide the inescapable allusion to human

occupancy. I have constructed a profoundly personal and markedly feminine space. The bed is emblazoned with a crimson stain manifested in the form of a decorative swathe of luscious strawberry slices. The eye can follow a residual trail, ultimately drawn to an analogous blush of scarlet that adorns the crotch of a pair of lacy underpants abandoned beside the bed. An ornamental rug rests on the floor at the foot of the bed; its sumptuous reds and fecund patterns mirror the embellished sheets. A pair of delicate lace shoes sits atop a simple wooden box. Their incongruous size suggests maternity and nurturance, the passing of time or the coming of age. A wardrobe houses an elegant web-like garment heaving with hundreds of scarlet, lace-covered eggs. Several of these meticulously adorned ovoids have unburdened themselves from their net and rest spent on the floor beneath the hanging form. A single chair seats a pair of strawberry-adorned gloves that drape with an air of expectation. A dressing table, into which the viewer is encouraged to delve, houses a variety of nest constructs: silky fur provides a tender cradle for strawberry-shrouded eggs; diminutive lace eggs surface from between layers of linen handkerchiefs; eggs issue forth from the cleavage of an austere cotton slip; a multitude of gloves embrace dried strawberry slices; the cups of an ascetic bra are painstakingly embroidered with antiquated discourse regarding the maternal role. A similar bra hangs from a hat stand that ushers the viewer into the next room.



Figure 33: Sue Jackson, views of second room installation (lounge room), 2011. Photograph: Jasper da Seymour.

The second room (Figure 33) contains a meagre assemblage of furniture and takes the form of a lounge or sitting room. A plump armchair supports a nest of lace eggs, some of which expose their luxurious, yet redundant, interiors stuffed with fur. The nest, constructed of pine branches, resembles a sleeping fox circling its strange clutch. The directional spiralling of needles pervades the space of the chair implying that the nest is an organic extension of the object. A table lamp carries a shade constructed of strawberries and radiates a warm, seductive glow that casts elusive shadows upon the wall behind. A chaise lounge sits opposite the armchair and hosts only a pair of long evening gloves transformed into a fur-lined nest,

inside which are nestled a small clutch of delicate lace eggs. Huddled around a leg of the chaise are a collective of hairballs whose surface is stitched with text. Chair and lounge face across another floor rug that escorts the viewer toward the third and final room.



Figure 34: Sue Jackson, views of third room installation (sewing room), 2011. Photograph: Jasper da Seymour.

This room (Figure 34) offers a site of industry evoking a woman's place full of the tools of her gender and the products of her labour. Sewing paraphernalia occupies ubiquitous nests inside wooden drawers. Inherited wisdom issues forth on embroidered silk ribbon wound around wooden reels. Metres upon metres of silk binding carry her thoughts, stories and memories. While previous rooms hint at the residual aspects of my identity, this room is a testament to the painstaking construction of my gender, a scrupulous telling of my story and

a faithful tribute to what I have experienced and learned along the way. There is a more explicit bodily reference seen here in *Surrogate* (2011) and *Separation Anxiety* (2011) that reference my diminishing fertility and corporeal decline.

The term 'balancing act' may appropriately describe a body of work that deals with several central concepts. It is my intention that the viewer be aware of the interface between inner and outer. I have endeavoured to stimulate the tensions at various points of actual and metaphorical interplay. These tensions are created, for example, wherever the private becomes public, the intimate is externalised or the internal is pushed to the surface. This liminal position is activated when a confidence is shared, a memory summoned or the abject expelled.