

craft + design enquiry
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Relational Craft and Design

Edited by Peter McNeil and Rosemary Hawker



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Welcome note

Welcome to *craft + design enquiry* issue number 4, *Relational Craft and Design*, edited by Peter McNeil and Rosemary Hawker.

This issue marks a change for *craft + design enquiry*, being the first issue of the journal published by ANU E Press under our new hosting arrangements with ANU School of Art. By the end of this year, past issues of *craft + design enquiry* will be accessible at ANU E Press. Through ANU E Press it will also be possible to purchase hard copy versions of all *craft + design enquiry* issues.

Thanks are extended to The Australian National University, ANU E Press and the ANU School of Art for their support in enabling *craft + design enquiry* to transition from Craft Australia and continue providing a publishing platform and promotional tool for Australian craft and design research excellence. *craft + design enquiry* also acknowledges the financial assistance of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council for the Arts.

We are pleased to announce the addition of a new General Section to issues 5 and 6 open to papers on any aspect of craft and design research. Details at the back of this issue. Each issue of *craft + design enquiry* will continue to feature a Themed Section.

With the move to ANU, we are rebuilding our mailing lists. Add your name to the *craft + design enquiry* mailing list by emailing your address to jenny.deves@anu.edu.au with 'mailing list request' in the subject heading.

Jenny Deves
Managing Editor

Editors' introduction

Peter McNeil and Rosemary Hawker

Relational Craft and Design

Current debates surrounding craft and design tend towards contrasting the past and the present, the Western and the non-Western, the industrialised and the developing world. This indicates the need within the academy to address a series of issues affecting the relationship between design and the crafts in a world that is often perceived as problematically 'globalised' and homogenous. What are the processes through which local producers, entrepreneurs and consumers, operating from both cosmopolitan and provincial sites, interact to create connections in this global context?

At the same time, vigorous debates about disciplinary parameters see craft and design and their relations with art characterised by wildly divergent interpretations. 'Craft' has again become a significant and weighty word at a time when the meaning of 'design' is shifting both within and outside the visual arts. Today, we note everything from drug design to policy design, where 'design thinking' indicates a higher level of consideration, conceptual and strategic thinking. Within this context, contemporary craft might appear as specific and cultural, while design's ubiquity carries certain risks. Design's claim to a significant social role links us back to earlier craft polemics, as was highlighted in the previous issue of *craft + design enquiry*, in its discussion of sustainability as having its own history as an idea in design and craft (Hughes, 2011).

While definitions of craft and design are diverse, we can be sure that today they are embraced by the broader arts and humanities in a way they have not been since the nineteenth century. The inter-disciplinarity that has driven society and culture since the late-twentieth century insists upon this, at the same time that the relationships across art, craft and design remain open to endless interpolation.

One somewhat neglected aspect of this relationship is craft's role in connecting aspects of creative culture. How is craft articulated (or elided) in contemporary art, architecture, fashion, and design generally — as well as in film — if one considers the rise of model-making and other visual effects in contemporary art culture? What does it mean that overlooked aspects of craft have been at work in all of these practices, but were often referred to with different language, through terms such as 'technique' and 'process', during the years that craft was 'unfashionable'? Within this trajectory, what is the current understanding of the relationship (and lack thereof) between craft and design in itself?

It is a pity that many attempts to argue for the social and cultural value of craft and design do so by collapsing distinctions between this pairing and also with art. To regret this is not to devalue craft or design. Rather, the distinct, meaningful and valuable aspects of visual culture can be maintained in both their connections to and contradistinction from art. In Maria Elena Buszek's excellent *Extra/ordinary: Craft and contemporary art* (2011), a set of essays addressing the use of craft in contemporary art makes clear that to maintain the distinctions across media and disciplines is to better understand what happens when they come together in their diversity.

Despite the risks of turning craft and design too closely towards art and its interpretation, it was with that coming together in mind that we, in this issue of *craft + design enquiry*, were keen to acknowledge that a number of writers had recently referred to Nicolas Bourriaud's (2002) concept of 'relational art and aesthetics', as relevant to craft and design. Bourriaud's concept has been enormously influential in the interpretation of contemporary art, but how much of what he identifies in the importance of the generation of social relations over the object of art can be seen as that which marks out the historical distinction between art and craft? In celebrating audience response and cultural reference over the value of the art object as such, how much does Bourriaud's concept of contemporary art allow us to understand it as following craft and design? A crafted object reiterates the values of its culture and the importance of continuing to make the same thing, because it is 'good' and it is designed and made well. When the crafted object communicates those qualities effectively and meaningfully to its audience so that they might share an understanding of something greater than the object itself and its use, this seems entirely consistent with what Bourriaud refers to as the 'relational'.

Bourriaud's insistence that art services the activity that surrounds it seems a possible means for articulating something that, in other contexts, has been a 'problem' for craft and design: their emphasis on material and process. As signs not just of social relations but models for those relations, the exchange of ideas and information that the 'relational' characterises is able to acknowledge the material and conceptual life of craft and design. Importantly, it does this without collapsing medium and disciplinary distinctions.

The editors called for papers addressing these issues as part of the Art Association of Australia and New Zealand (AAANZ) conference in Adelaide in 2010. We welcomed contributions that accessed craftsperson's work as 'design' or reconsidered the ground on which such disciplinary claims have been made. A surprising number of papers with a strong historical focus came forward. The notion of the 'relational' seemed to allow a variety of scholarly operations to take place; the term may have fostered an almost sociological sense of the 'actors' operating in a 'field' of action as much as an aesthetic response to the topic, although the latter is strongly present in the essays that resulted.

Sally Gray's 'Relational craft and Australian fashionability in the 1970s–80s: Friends, pathways, ideas and aesthetics', studies a group of artists' and

designers' shared aesthetic enthusiasms for, for example, the visual legacy of modernist artist and designer Sonia Delaunay. This enthusiasm, she argues, connected a group of interdisciplinary Australians who were also friends and creative collaborators. 'Relationality' is described by Gray in a number of ways. The first meaning is literal; what are the dynamics of such creative collaborations and how can we recover this particular constellation of creative relationships as an historical episode? The second aspect of 'relationality' that interests Gray rests with institutional collecting trends, and the curators who exhibited and interpreted the work of the fashion designers and artists she addresses. Her third engagement with relationality is as a set of ideas, influential on their work, and current at the time. These include an intellectual and material inter-disciplinarity that moves across craft, art and fashion; an impulse to engage with eclectic visual ideas from a range of global sources, and an interest in proposing versions of identity and cultural location. Her work could be seen to respond to Bourriaud's claim that 'the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever scale chosen by the artist' (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 13).

Juliette Peers's paper addresses a very different time and place but also reconstructs the relational network of two creative practitioners working in close proximity in 1888, at Grosvenor Chambers, 9 Collins Street, Melbourne, at the very centre of nineteenth-century, boom-time Victoria, Australia. Unlike Gray's set of creative agents from the 1970s and early 1980s, who were partly expatriate and constantly on the move, Peers's subjects must have seen each other pass by each day in their prominent commercial chambers. Yet they and their patron-clients would have exercised a very different hierarchical attitude towards each other. Peers takes as her empirical material the well-known artist Tom Roberts and the couturier 'Mrs Eeles', representing in a dialectical fashion the 'fine arts' and fashion; but is it correctly described as 'fashion design' here or is it rather an act of deft 'crafting', just as material as Roberts' sketchy oil painting? Roberts, an iconic Australian painter, paid his way through portrait commissions but has been venerated for bush pastorals that played a role in establishing Australian identity as rural, not urban. In Australia, his is a household name. Mrs Eeles, on the other hand, is practically unknown, but has been rehabilitated by Peers in recent journal articles, where she demonstrates the mastery of composition, colour and technique found in the few surviving examples of Eeles's high fashion, women's garments.

Peer's essay here also rescripts a space. Grosvenor Chambers was claimed to be the first building in Australia built specifically for use by creative professionals. Until being façaded (which is a type of civic mothballing) in the 1980s, the tenants' list of the building was glamorous and romantic with several generations of famous names making the building their base. Peers focuses on the contrasts in Roberts's and Eeles's reputation and output. While Roberts's *Shearing the Rams* was being painted, an ambitious 'salon de couture' operated from a floor below. Such relations can certainly be seen to respond to Bourriaud's interest in

‘a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space’ (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 113).

Part of the value of Peers’s approach is that within her argument ‘place can also be a point of sense-making in discussing historic, pre-twentieth century Australian art and craft’. What does it mean to consider a nineteenth-century commercial space in contemporary terms as ‘hub’ or an ‘incubator’? How can we rethink and reconceptualise histories? Peers’ concludes that: ‘Deploying more recent paradigms for sense-making in visual culture and its histories offers a more productive and informative point of interchange between Roberts and Eeles than twentieth century fine-arts centric constructs’.

Berry’s ‘Relational style: Craft as social identity in Australian fashion’ returns us to the present. The contemporary Australian fashion label Romance Was Born enacts a complex set of relations between craft, art and design as manifested across the production, display and consumption of their collections. Designers Anna Plunkett and Luke Sales combine culturally debased handicrafts such as crochet and macramé with the cultural cachet provided by collaborations with artists such as Del Katherine Barton and Kate Rohde. The result, Berry argues, is a collection of ‘phantasmagorical garments’ that transgress design imperatives of conventional wearability and establish a tension between ready-to-wear, wearable art, couture and homemade fashion.

To contravene the distinctions between art, craft and design is not unique to Plunkett and Sales, or to contemporary fashion. They draw on a history of colloquial craft in Australian fashion, most notably explored during the 1970s and 1980s in the parochially emblematic designs of Jenny Kee and Linda Jackson. Making important links with Gray’s work on the 1970s, Berry argues that Romance Was Born extends Kee’s and Jackson’s ‘articulation of a uniquely local kitsch aesthetic to include a global and eclectic mix of ethnic, popular culture, historical and artistic referents’. They approach these elements with tongue-in-cheek humour by using overblown craft techniques to exaggerate the symbolic qualities of high fashion to the point of kitsch. In this way, Berry concludes, Plunkett and Sales appear to be consciously playing out the perennially unstable balance between fashion’s avant-garde imperatives of individualism and uniqueness and the commercial modalities of mass appeal. Berry demonstrates how style for Romance Was Born is based in a relational aesthetic that acts as a site for the expression of cultural and historical reference and their dynamic interpretation and reconfiguration of these sources.

Sera Waters’s ‘Repetitive crafting: The shared aesthetic of time in Australian contemporary art’ analyses a strain of contemporary art whose method of production is that of time-consuming ‘repetitive crafting’. Contemporary Australian artists Justine Khamara, Tim Sterling, Troy-Anthony Baylis, Laith McGregor and Ray Harris are examples of artists who craft their art through repetition. Their processes are predominantly derived from everyday activities; fine biro drawing, precisely cut photographs, laboriously knitted forms, limitless

shampooing, or interlocking paperclips en masse. Through this repetition, small and ordinary gestures are given critical value and are able to traverse subversive territory.

Central to Waters's discussion of repetitive crafting is the re-evaluation of the term 'craft', contemporarily understood as 'not a movement or a field, but rather a set of concerns that is implicated across many types of cultural production' (Adamson, 2010, p. 3). Here, these concerns refer not to precision or sustaining traditional skills, but rather to artistic manifestations of physical proximities (between art and body) that speak of endurance, intimacy, and complex relationships with 'labour'. Above all, repetitive crafting employs 'time' as an aesthetic that acts to slow down and reiterate the bodily and personal connections to the making and viewing process. The values of repetitive crafting, Waters argues, transfer to viewing audiences and proliferate through networked and participatory cultures. Consistent with Bourriaud, she argues that by employing and exhibiting the aesthetic of 'time' in the relational sphere, such artworks become part of a larger political project to 'encourage an inter-human intercourse which is different to the "zones of communication" that are forced upon us' (Bourriaud, 2002).

Sandra Karina Löschke's 'Crafting relations: Aspects of materiality and interactivity in exhibition environments' provides an architectural historians' response to concerns of this issue of *craft + design enquiry*. Her initial thoughts were about the Constructivists' concern for *faktura* as an organising principle of creative production, which can be seen in opposition to the idea of 'facture' in traditional painting. *Faktura* was a notion that united the arts (and crafts) of painting, sculpture, architecture, film, and the design of everyday objects under the basic premises of material and construction. In this context El Lissitzky's demonstration rooms provide an important case study. As the editors posed in their call for papers, is it possible to examine *faktura* as a replacement for the notion of 'craft' in response to new developments in materials, science and technologies at that moment in time?

Using Lissitzky's Hannover and Dresden demonstration rooms as case studies, Löschke identifies 'an inventory of techniques and materials deployed for the construction of what has been considered the first relational environment'. Here her aim is to consider art practices associated with *relational aesthetics* and *postproduction*. How is *faktura* different to the concept of craft (which it rejected) and industrial production (which it embraced)? Is it an adequate aesthetic response to new developments in materials, science and technologies as well as the rapid industrialisation at that moment in time? By focusing on the iconic 'Hanover demonstration room', visited by Alfred H. Barr in the 1920s and subsequently celebrated in his now classic writings, Löschke identifies an inventory of tools, techniques and materials (immaterial and concrete), deployed for the construction of what has been considered the first 'total environment'.

We conclude our special issue of *craft + design enquiry* with Richard Read's 'The relational origins of inter-media art in painting, interior design and picture framing',

which addresses the craftsperson Pamela Gaunt's *Errant Abstractions*. Read's paper closely examines the particular historical charge associated with Gaunt's work and its self-conscious anachronism of traditional floral designs from Britain, Italy, India and Central Asia, incorporated as basic modules in her installation *Errant Abstractions* (2008). Starting with a phenomenological response to several kinds of fantasy that viewers might experience from interaction with the work, the essay establishes a broad historical framework for the confluence of painting, interior design and frame-making in contemporary multi-media art and craft. Read's essay also addresses the role of art and decoration in increasing the immediacy of nature within buildings or abstracting it to a civilising distance from the world outside. He also identifies modern hybrid works as exploiting anachronism (in Walter Benjamin's sense) when they re-enact the creative conflicts between painters, interior decorators and picture framers that once informed their necessary collaborations. Read's careful historical readings and allusions which range from collecting and the marketplace, to the outfitting of houses, remind us that for contemporary craft and design practice to flourish, a firm grasp of its antecedents, relationships and discontinuities is necessary.

And so we return to the idea of relationships as defining the work, the external and multiple factors that draw the work into its form and content. Bourriaud's concepts of relational aesthetics offer an obvious challenge to the disciplines of craft and design that have been historically constituted in social relations. The papers collected here show the limits but also the opportunities for practices that play across the gap of aesthetics and social meaning; of art, craft and design.

Peter McNeil is Professor of Design History at the University of Technology Sydney. Trained as an art and design historian, his research crosses disciplines, chronologies and geographies from the early-modern (c. 1500–1800) to the late-twentieth century. In 2008 he was appointed concurrently as Foundation Chair of Fashion Studies at Stockholm University, where he leads its ambitious research agenda within the EU, including his aim to connect historical findings with contemporary design practices.

Dr Rosemary Hawker is a Senior Lecturer in Art Theory at the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University. Her research and teaching specialises in interpreting contemporary art and design with particular attention to medium relations and theories of representation.

Relational craft and Australian fashionability in the 1970s–80s: Friends, pathways, ideas and aesthetics

Sally Gray

Abstract: Five Australian interdisciplinary practitioners, working across fashion, craft, art and design, in Sydney and Melbourne in the 1970s–80s, shared friendships, aesthetic ideas and public presentation of their work. The ways they chose to make and disseminate their work were influenced by historically reclaimed visual conventions and craft discourses of the time, along with related circumstances of curatorship, collecting and dealing. All of this was foregrounded by contemporary interest in issues of identity and subjectivity as part of a postmodern re-orienting of 'what was what' in visual culture. The essay examines the multi-dimensional 'relationality' of these interconnections.

In this paper I trace the work and influences of a group of young Australians whose creative practice in the 1970s and 1980s encompassed fashion, craft, art and design. They shared personal friendships and visual concerns but, importantly, the *idea* of relationality between people and creative ideas is integral to their work. Peter Tully, the Melbourne-born, Sydney-active, artist and craftsperson (1947–92) often remarked on the importance to his work of a network of creative friends and influences. With his trademark self-mocking irony, he named William Yang 'the court photographer', referring to Yang's photographic documentation of Tully's parties, shows and appearances, and those of fashionable Sydney generally (Yang, 1984). Tully was also in the habit of referring to his extended creative network as 'the family'. Like others discussed here, Tully had 'relationality' at the heart of his life and work in the seventies and eighties, well in advance of Nicolas Bourriaud's invitation for us to think of art's 'theoretical horizon' as being the 'realm of human interactions' and 'social context' (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 14).

The key relational players considered here are Peter Tully, David McDiarmid (1952–95), Linda Jackson (b. 1950), Jenny Kee (b. 1947) and Clarence Chai (b. 1946). Although they also collaborated with many others, this group shares a range of relational concerns which are the subject of this essay.

A fascinating confluence in Australian art and design history occurred when this group, and a wider circle of friends, met and interacted visually, socially and creatively. A set of visual and cultural ideas came together, incubating a hip, postcolonial Australian fashionability, from the early 1970s. Their work, collectively and individually, involved a language of playful colour and contrasts; an interest in the decorative, handcrafted, allegorical and historicist, and an engagement with questions of subjectivity and place. They collectively enjoyed a postmodern

visual sensibility and a refusal of the received common sense of good taste; their contribution to fashion was, to quote one commentator on Clarence Chai's work, 'definitely not for the shy and retiring' (Barden, 1981, p. 15).

'Relationality' in this episode can be thought of in a number of ways. Firstly, the perception by this group of artists and designers of the importance, to their creative practice, of significant personal relationships. They were not a 'movement', but a study of their work and interconnected lives reveals something of a shared creative vision. The second relationality concerns institutional collecting trends, and the curators who exhibited and interpreted their work. The third notion of relationality that I propose refers to a set of ideas, influential on their work and current at the time. These include an intellectual and material inter-disciplinarity which melds craft, art and fashion; an impulse to engage with eclectic visual ideas from a range of global sources, and an interest in proposing versions of identity and cultural location; Tully's comments above about 'family' and 'court' contain the camp 'attitude' which lays claim to a self-invented group identity not reliant on externally defined concepts of what is fabulous and what is not.



Figure 1. Jenny Kee (left) and Linda Jackson (right) in front of Sonia Delaunay's *Prisme Electrique* (1914), Pompidou Centre, Paris, October 1977.

Source: Fran Moore.

The photograph (Figure 1) was taken in Paris by Fran Moore in October 1977. Jackson on the right is wearing her Linda Jackson-designed and -made, patchwork felt skirt and waistcoat titled *Delaunay* (1977), now in the collection of the Powerhouse Museum. These are worn with a hand-knit jumper she had made from a 1940s geometric pattern, using her own colour scheme in five-

ply wool (Jackson, 2009). Kee (on the left) is wearing a Linda Jackson Chinese poplin appliqué top and skirt (1977), also in a Sonia Delaunay-inspired design, and a hand-knit cardigan designed by Kee and knitted by Jan Ayres, Kee's principal knitter. Kee also wears a *Masai* plastic tubing necklace by Tully, similar to those shown in Tully's 1976 and 1977 exhibitions in Melbourne and Sydney and in subsequent exhibitions under his 'Urban Tribalwear' rubric. The photograph was taken when Jackson, Kee and Moore (Jackson's then partner) were on their 'suitcase' or 'trunk' show tour to Milan, Paris and New York in late 1977, showing the work of Jackson and Kee under the Flamingo Park label. The collection was a hit with the invited guests who saw it and was taken up by Anna Piaggi of Italian *Vogue* (*Vogue Italia*, December 1977).

The image is emblematic of the designers' shared aesthetic enthusiasms, in this case for the visual legacy of modernist artist and designer Delaunay. This enthusiasm was shared by the group of friends and creative collaborators who are the subject of this essay. They met in Melbourne and Sydney in their late teens or early 20s, before they went on to have the creative careers which, between them, covered the realms of art, design, fashion, craft and community cultural development. They all at one time or another lived together, worked together or showed their work with one or more of the group. They collaborated on parties, outfits, collections, exhibitions and fashion parades.

Jackson and Kee, have been fairly widely written about (McPhee, 1985; Jackson, 1987; Maynard, 1999, 2001; Gray, 1999, 2010, 2011; Jovic, 2012; Kee, 2006; Leong and Somerville, 2010) and the others, most notably Chai, less so. The inter-connected ideas, people and creative output in this group has not, however, previously been discussed. They formed a unique relational network with a unique set of visual histories and influences. We are only just beginning to come to terms with the cultural complexity of what was happening in studio-based Australian fashion in this period (Whitfield, 2010), particularly in Sydney. Questions of who was moving where, who knew whom, what people were thinking and making and how they were doing it, remain to be grappled with. I am interested in tracing the conceptualisation and material production of the work of these people beyond its graphic representation in magazines and photographs.

Studio-based hand-crafted fashion

My selected group of five were all small-scale, studio-based practitioners who at the time had no particular ambition to become part of the mainstream Australian fashion industry as such — they weren't looking for mass or factory production, large staffs or complex business arrangements. They didn't see themselves in competition with the big names of the established rag trade. As contemporary fashion writer and curator Jane de Teliga put it 'they worked like artists' (de Teliga, 2011). Moreover, they themselves saw their practice in these terms — they were in the process of making fashionable, creative and artistic

lives, rather than business-based careers. Fashion curator, now academic, Robyn Healy sees this studio-based fashion as in some ways 'a uniquely Australian thing' (2010). As she sees it, this was a particularly Australian kind of 'bespoke or crafted practice which grew up alongside the more commercial, factory-produced Australian fashion scene' (2010). After nearly 10 years in the fashion world, Chai stated in an interview in 1983: 'I don't want to be like the more established designers ... I still want to be involved in innovative fashion' (Barden, 1983). Chai now says he never saw himself as 'becoming big', on the contrary, he thinks:

It was more about friendship instead of a big corporation — everything [was] interconnected rather than people coming in from the outside. I always wanted to keep it under my control and be a bit more creative. Once you get bigger you have to water down your designs. (2011)

'Radical', 'avant garde', 'innovative' were terms commonly used by the fashion press at the time to describe the work of this group. The term 'art clothes' was also used in art, design and craft discourse. As Grace Cochrane put it, 'Many designers set up small businesses ... designing and making art-clothing and accessories' (1989, n.p.).



Figure 2. Peter Tully (lower left), Jenny Kee (centre top), Linda Jackson (top right), David McDiarmid (to left of Kee) and friends, photographed at the opening of McDiarmid and Tully's joint exhibitions, Hogarth Galleries, Sydney, 1977.

Source: William Yang.

Significant others

All of this group, except for Kee, had their initial training and creative roots in Melbourne. All chose Sydney as the site to fully develop their careers, most from the mid 1970s, Chai from the mid 1980s. Jackson trained in fashion at Emily McPherson College in Melbourne, in 1966–67, and studied photography at Prahran Technical College in 1968. She met Tully and Chai when one day a stranger (who turned out to be Jenny Bateson, a friend of theirs) called out to her on Cardigan Street, Carlton: ‘Hey, you look great, come up and meet my friends’. Linda accompanied her to 445 Cardigan Street, where she found housemates Clarence and Peter making costumes for the 1968 annual Melbourne Arts Ball. Jackson would work with Chai as a collaborator and seamstress at his Paraphernalia vintage clothing store in Melbourne’s Metropole Arcade while in the process of developing her ‘Linda Jackson’ design label.



Figure 3. Margot Gray, ‘Chai’ Parade, Universal Workshop, Melbourne, 1978.

Source: Clarence Chai.

Chai's independent fashion career began in 1974 when he opened his store Chai Clothing and Accessories, at 5 Crossley Street, Melbourne. He had previously been a vintage clothing and textile dealer under the Paraphernalia name with his former partner, Paul Craft. An extended period in London in 1973, where he saw the collection of Australian-born, vintage clothing dealer Vern Lambert, had convinced him that he could translate his enthusiasm for vintage textiles and his training in graphic design at RMIT Melbourne into a fashion practice. He had worked as a graphic designer for Garry Emery and Brian Sadgrove in Melbourne, and had always had a strongly graphic visual sensibility. His feeling for clothing had been nurtured in childhood when he loved 'picking up the pins' in his neighbours' sewing workroom at 56 Orchard Road, Singapore. Chai sold Linda Jackson designs along with those of Jenny Bannister and others who were making edgy, radical clothing by hand. In November 1978 Chai launched his second shop at 105 Collins Street, with a parade at The Universal Workshop in Fitzroy, showing Jackson, Kee, Bannister and his own Chai label. According to a contemporary observer, Chai's vivid shop-window display was 'a standing affront to the sensibilities of the sedate society matrons who promenaded down this high rent strip of retail property' (Barden, 1981, p. 15).

Tully trained as a jeweller at Victoria State College and later at Randwick Technical College, Sydney, after years of world travel in his early 20s, working as a waiter and English-teacher to pay his way. He and Chai had met as teenage waiters, in the coastal Victorian town of Lorne, in the summer of 1964/65. They later lived together in shared houses in Carlton, where making outfits, dressing up and partying were central. In 1969 Linda and Peter, along with Linda's then partner Fran Moore, travelled together to Papua New Guinea where they lived for a year in Madang and Lae soaking up the tribal aesthetics that would impact on both Tully's and Jackson's work. After this, they travelled, separately and together, throughout South East Asia, Africa and Europe. Jackson worked as a seamstress, honing her skills, including working for six months in Paris with fashion label Mia and Vicki. Tully was continually collecting transcultural visual material — feathers, tribal jewellery, handcrafted textiles — and ideas for his later jewellery design, from sources as diverse as New Guinea, Ethiopia, Singapore and Amsterdam.

McDiarmid studied film, art history and illustration at Swinburne College of Technology in Melbourne in 1969–70 before becoming a gay activist artist. Travelling back and forth between Sydney and Melbourne in the early 1970s, he helped found Sydney Gay Liberation in 1972 and formed a radical, gay male, politically focused, household in Melbourne in the same year, simultaneously developing the material for what would become his political art. He met Tully in 1973 and, briefly lovers, they shared a house in Elgin Street Carlton. In 1974–75 they travelled together in South East Asia before separately settling in Sydney in 1975. It was the fact that Jackson and Moore had already moved to Sydney, after Linda met Kee in 1973, that convinced Tully and McDiarmid that they too would make the move north on their return from Asia. McDiarmid was soon handpainting fabrics for Jackson's dresses and Tully was making jewellery for

Flamingo Park. For the next 18 years, until Tully's death in Paris in 1992, Tully and McDiarmid shared ideas, projects, politics, inspiration, friends, exhibitions and, at times, both studio and living space in Sydney and New York.

Kee studied dress design at East Sydney Technical College in 1963–64 before her departure for London in November 1965. In London she worked at Biba, and later learned fashion history under the informal tutelage of Lambert when she worked for Emmerton and Lambert selling vintage textiles and couture at Chelsea Antique Market between 1967 and 1972. Kee met Jackson in June 1973 at Craft's Paraphernalia stand at the Antique Winter Fair at Bonython Gallery, in Sydney. Craft, who had previously run Paraphernalia in partnership with Chai, was showing a collection of Jackson's one-off, hand-crafted garments along with his selection of art nouveau and art deco collectibles. Kee says she was:

... stopped in [her] tracks by a row of Hawaiian and assorted fifties print gored skirts with bra tops, little flared shorts and cute shirts. Each outfit had a different pattern: roses, letters of the alphabet, abstract shapes. I knew this girl and I were on the same wave-length. (2006, p. 135)

Kee had returned to Sydney in December 1972 and was about to open her soon-to-be-famous 'frock shop' Flamingo Park in Sydney's Strand Arcade, selling innovative handmade and vintage clothing. It was the instant visual and creative rapport between the two women, along with a job offer in Sydney for Moore, which convinced she and Jackson that they should immediately resettle in Sydney (Jackson, 2011; Moore, 2011). Between 1973 and 1982, when she established her own Bush Couture label, Jackson's creative output would help create the signature aesthetic, and glamorous cachet, of Flamingo Park.

Establishing a youthful, hand-crafted aesthetic

On 10 December 1974, the first Flamingo Park parade, 'Flamingo Follies', was held at the Hingara restaurant in Chinatown, Sydney. It opened with Jackson's 'Opera House' outfit in celebration of her adopted city and Joern Utzon's newly opened Sydney Opera House. With white 'sails' appliquéd onto blue linen, the two-piece outfit had the one-off, 'artful', quotational sensibility which would mark Jackson's and Kee's output in the shared Flamingo Park years. In this first show, Kee, Jackson and their collaborators had brought a set of ideas to fruition that found a receptive moment in mid-1970s Sydney. The most significant of these was the capacity to view Australia from the outside and to create a sense of Australian fashionability which did not rely on familiar local frames of reference. Counterintuitively, this involved the inauguration of the Australiana for which the two designers are well known. Kee had already developed the prototypes for her Australiana knits by 1974; Tully and McDiarmid were among the first to wear them (Kee, 2006, p. 156). The first Flamingo Follies show was colourful, irreverent, hip and graphically compelling. Young, non-professional models moved with youthful verve to reggae music, creating a visual and corporeal language as yet unseen on Australian catwalks.

Dealing in the decorative

The embracing of expressive, experimental and decorative personal adornment, as a reaction to high modernism in architecture, fashion and art was, as we now see it, part of the 'post modern turn' (Best and Kellner, 1997). A search for a sense of style to delight and entertain, playful quotation from familiar and historical visual tropes, and optical stimulation from patterns, colours and contrasts, previously thought of as vulgar or tasteless, formed part of this. Commercial dealing in post-*belle époque* decorative arts expanded from the early 1970s when this group was setting its aesthetic agendas. Firms like Butler and Wilson, established in 1969 as an antique jewellery stand at Antiquarius, Kings Road, London, along with the major auction houses in London, New York and Paris, had helped create a new decorative and historicist fashionability through their dealing in jewellery and objects d'art from the *fin de siècle* to the mid-twentieth century. In 1970, Craft and Chai, then in their early 20s, established Paraphernalia, first at an antique market in Bourke Street and then, in the Metropole Arcade, Melbourne. Paraphernalia quickly became one of the leading Australian dealers in museum-quality objects dating from the 1890s to the 1940s. Paraphernalia also sold, in a second, adjoining shop in the arcade, clothing and textiles of the same period. This was Chai's special interest, and would lead to establishment of his Chai fashion label and shop in 1974.

It was also in the 1970s that interest in collecting vintage couture and textiles took off. Kee recounts how Lambert 'had a history of global fashion hanging in his shop and filed away in his brain' (Kee, 2006, p. 76). In 1970–71 Lambert had worked with Cecil Beaton on the important exhibition, 'Fashion an Anthology' at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (Beaton, 1971, p. 12–14). Lambert also sold inventive contemporary dress, made from vintage fabrics, at his shops in the Chelsea and Kensington antique markets. Chai remembers how inspired he was by Lambert's textile collecting acuity when he visited the Chelsea Antique Market in 1973, recalling that Lambert 'was doing a lot of patchwork stuff made out of old fabrics; skirts and dresses from scarves; bomber jackets from old tapestry and curtains' (2011). Chai had similar fabrics, which he had been collecting since 1970 for Paraphernalia. In 1974, on his return to Melbourne, he opened his separate fashion business, Chai, to sell his line of garments made from vintage fabrics.

Through the 1960s and early 1970s, Sotheby's London held a number of important auctions of Ballets Russes costumes and sets (Spencer, 1973, p. 245). Almost a third of the funds raised from the March 1973 Sotheby's sale came from bids placed on behalf of the not-yet-opened Australian National Gallery (ANG, later National Gallery of Australia) (Pritchard, 2010, p. 167). Lambert acquired costumes and backdrops from the Ballets Russes auction sales, some of which he showed Chai on his visit to London in 1973, and examples of which Lambert gave to Jackson and Kee.



Figure 4. Jenny Kee wearing Natalia Goncharova-designed Ballets Russes costume from *le Coq d'Or*, photographed in David McDiarmid's Australian Dream Lounge, Hogarth Galleries, Sydney, 1977.

Source: William Yang.

The photograph of Kee, above, wearing an original Ballets Russes costume, was taken by Yang at Hogarth Galleries Sydney in December 1977, at the joint opening of Tully's 'Living Plastics' exhibition and McDiarmid's *Australian Dream Lounge*. McDiarmid had just returned from his first extended period in the United States and the dream lounge was his insider/outsider comment on postwar Australiana. Kee is wearing a Natalia Goncharova-designed 'peasant maid's' costume from *le Coq d'Or*, (1914), purchased at auction by Lambert and given to Kee as a gift. She is photographed in McDiarmid's *Australian Dream Lounge*.

The dynamism and colour of Ballets Russes costume design was incorporated into the aesthetic mix of this group of Australian practitioners. McDiarmid did a range of handpainted designs on white wool-crepe for Jackson outfits for the 1977 Flamingo Folies parade. Based on Nicholas Roerich's designs for the original production of *le Sacre du Printemps* (1913), this work is typical of a decorative, historicist aesthetic adopted by McDiarmid for his fabric painting work and demonstrates both his attention to craft technique and the group's eclectic range of visual sources.



Figure 5. Linda Jackson wearing her white wool-crepe outfit with handpainted design by David McDiarmid, based on Nicholas Roerich's designs for the Ballets Russes production of *le Sacre du Printemps* (1913), Jackson is photographed in front of McDiarmid's *Wattle and Scribbly Bark* mural at 155 Little Oxford St, Darlinghurst, Sydney, 1977.

Source: David McDiarmid.

Fashionable identity and subjectivity

As will be evident, this group was well travelled, with wide exposure to global visual culture, before starting their creative careers. They developed the capacity to view Australia from the outside and to collect and interpret visual and cultural ideas wherever they found them — whether that was Addis Ababa, New York, Penang or Paris — and to share their visual enthusiasms and influences. Kee, Jackson and Tully are all well known for their adoption of Australiana motifs in their work — flora and fauna, visual quotations from tourist kitsch. McDiarmid is less well known for this but, as mentioned, his *Australian Dream Lounge* installation at Hogarth Galleries in 1977 celebrated, with an ironic inflection, Australian postwar suburban optimism.

As mentioned above, they all shared an enthusiasm for Sonia Delaunay whose work they had simultaneously discovered through the books (Damase, 1971, 1972) on her work and career, published in the last decade of Delaunay's life — she died in 1979. Visits to art museums in Europe and North America also inspired

an interest in Delaunay's art-as-life inter-disciplinarity, and her collaborative projects, which provided a model for this group who saw similarities with what they were doing.

Always interested in relationships between art and fashion, Jackson had been influenced by the Fauves and the Ballets Russes and Jackson and Kee were both interested in Delaunay's drawings and her writings on theories of colour. Jackson had studied colour theory, in the 1960s, in books she had found in the Theosophical Bookshop in Melbourne. In those days Jackson recalls: 'There were not many books like that around. But I ordered every book on Delaunay the minute they were published — we were mad about her' (2009). Early in 1977 Kee asked Jackson to make her a felt appliqué outfit based on a Delaunay painting using discs of felt. 'It was through doing this' Jackson says:

... that I learned — by doing the cut-outs — how Delaunay had done what she did. It was through that, that I learned that language. Jenny and I were obsessed by what we called 'colour and shape'; when 'Rhythm and Colour' [Damase, 1972] came to our attention it was revelation. (2009)

Delaunay herself had famously discovered her own modernist method when she made a patchwork coverlet for her son Charles in 1911. This intimate crafted work is credited with being her introduction to abstraction.

Tully shared this Delaunay enthusiasm and made jewellery such as the necklace of geometric discs entitled, *Delaunay Delight* (now in a Melbourne private collection), and a plastic and vinyl waistcoat of the same name with the same geometric discs (both 1977). The latter, in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), Melbourne, was shown in the NGV's 'Manstyle' exhibition (March–December 2011).

McDiarmid's enthusiasm for Delaunay became part of a joint project with Jackson as garments were prepared for the 1978 Flamingo Follies parade. Jackson recalls that:

David had been painting the delicate gum-leaves and the Russian Ballet designs in 1977 but when [we saw more of Delaunay's work], I suggested he use a bigger, wider brush and he produced [that work] for the 1978 Queen Street [Woollahra, Sydney] Flamingo Park parade. (2009)

Chai was simultaneously following his own enthusiasm for Delaunay in Melbourne, developing clothing based on cut-outs and geometric discs after he also acquired the Damase book in the early seventies. He saw Delaunay's work at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1979 and had acquired one of the Delaunay ceramic multiples made in the 1970s (Chai, 2011). Enthusiasm for Delaunay was just one of several, relationally interconnected visual themes and tropes, translated into a variety of crafted techniques, by this group as, separately and together, they mined global culture for inspiration.



Figure 6. David McDiarmid, hand-painted Sonia Delaunay-inspired design on silk chiffon for Linda Jackson outfit for Flamingo Park, 1978.

Source: Linda Jackson.

Intercultural relationality

Flamingo Follies and Chai parades showcased an Asian-inflected transcultural aesthetic and mood which saw Australia from the outside and embraced global visual aesthetics. Singapore-born Chai chose to emphasise an Asian aesthetic in his work (Chai, 2010), and a contemporary observer noted that Chai's shop was sometimes confused with a Chinese tea-shop when it opened close to Melbourne's Chinatown in 1974 (Mehra, 1984). The Hingara restaurant, site of the first Flamingo Follies, was Kee's Chinese father's preferred Chinatown restaurant. With its postwar laminex walls in lemon, rose and pale green, it was the perfect setting for this show and its audience, receptive as both were to a postmodern re-evaluation of what had been classed by modernist orthodoxy as kitsch. Yum cha was served (as it was also at Chai's 1978 parade) and Jackson's collection of Chinese opera costumes, acquired through Chinese friends in Kuala Lumpur in 1971, were integrated into the parade as more than mere 'exotic' additions. The event was small, with guests seated around an arrangement of restaurant tables, which doubled as the catwalk. The feeling was that something new, dynamic and special was happening.

Framing fashion within craft in the 1970s

The handmade and studio-based focus of this group was against a background of contemporary interest in the retrieval of craft and decorative arts within Australian (and international) art and design discourse. In the 10 years to 1974, the craft movement ‘gained a momentum undreamed of ten years before, and a wave of activity was generated throughout the country’ (Australia Council for the Arts, 1975). The ideological framing of craft was broad, encompassing conservative craft traditions as well as ‘alternative lifestyles, survival, women’s lib, the spread of the arts, and community schooling’ (Australia Council for the Arts, 1975). The political and ideological currency of craft gave an additional context, outside of the fashion industry, for this group’s critical reception.

This was particularly true for Tully’s work. The inauguration of the Crafts Board of the Australia Council in 1973 provided critical acceptance, funds and exhibition projects for Tully’s interdisciplinary art/fashion/craft practice. Tully had by this time established a strong independent aesthetic for his handmade jewellery pieces.

A bricolage of found and self-crafted objects, often using plastics, Tully’s jewellery re-evaluated and re-positioned suburban postwar kitsch. He employed a self-designated ‘tribal’ aesthetic, which he pulled together from his significant exposure to the world’s cultures, including from June 1979, urban New York. The Crafts Council of Australia hosted Tully’s 1980 Urban Tribalwear show on his return to Sydney from a Crafts Board supported residency in New York, where he had been influenced by the inter-racial gay scene he encountered there. McDiarmid designed the poster (Figure 7) for this, and all of Tully’s exhibitions. The support from the organised craft movement enabled Tully to simultaneously frame his work in terms of craft, community arts, fashion and gay cultural activism.

Tully had by 1980 exhibited in four one-person shows, including *Passion for Plastics* at, Ace Bourke’s, Ace’s Art Shop, in Edgecliff, Sydney (1976) and *Craft’s Paraphernalia* Gallery, then in Collins Street, Melbourne (1977); *Living Plastics* (1977) and *Peter Tully New Work* (1978) had both been shown at Hogarth Galleries, Sydney.

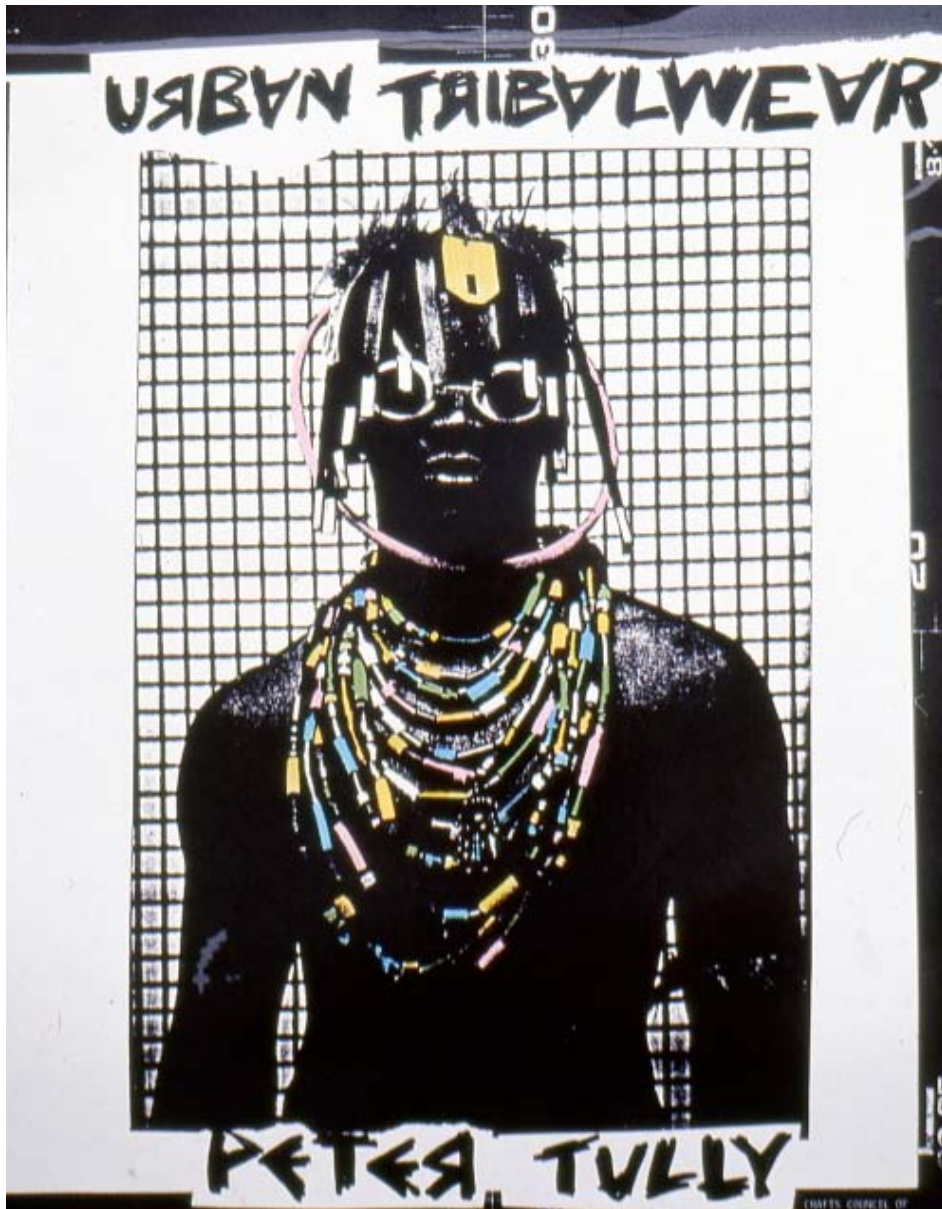


Figure 7. David McDiarmid, *Peter Tully Urban Tribalwear* poster, 1980.

Source: David McDiarmid.

All of these shows drew audiences who became devotees of Tully's 'outrageous' adornments (Eaton, 1985). His work after 1980 included a hybrid, sculptural form of fashionable adornment. Pieces such as the *Ceremonial Coat for the Grand Diva of the Paradise Garage* (1980) in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, and the *New age business suit*, in the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, collection, are examples of Tully's performative fashion/craft

practice, necessitating revised category definitions, which are still in play. Like the *Tojo Tunic* worn by Tully (Figure 8) they were often associated with dance party culture and his role from 1982 as artistic director of Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras.



Figure 8. Peter Tully (right), and friends, at Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, 1981. Tully is wearing *Tojo Tunic*.

Source: William Yang.

Tully was included in Crafts Board-supported group shows such as *Ten Australian Jewellers* (1977), travelling through South East Asia and the Pacific, and *Objects to Human Scale* (1979–80) travelling to Japan, the Philippines and Hong Kong. The Crafts Board of the Australia Council awarded him grants in 1979, 1982 and 1984. Tully's jewellery was sold in a fashion context through Flamingo Park and he made specially conceived pieces to go with Jackson's outfits, for example the *Artist* series he created for Jackson's evening dresses in the 1975 Flamingo Follies parade, at Bondi Pavilion. His necklaces, especially, were must-have accessories for hip young people (women and men) from Sydney, Melbourne and beyond.

Chai was more in the group picture in the late 1960s and early 1970s when he and Tully were making outfits for camp arts balls and parties and perfecting a form of independent-minded, queer-conscious, masculine clothing and deportment in Melbourne — Chai's airmen's suits were legendary (Craft, 2010). He was showing Kee's and Jackson's clothes in his Melbourne Chai parades in the late 1970s. After Sydney temporarily became the epicentre of Australian fashionability, from the mid 1970s, the creative dialogue within this group would become more of a Sydney thing and in 1983 Chai decided to also move north and concentrate

on making party outfits for the vibrant gay dance-party scene in Sydney. Based in the Strand Arcade, he shared group Arcade fashion parades with Flamingo Park. There are, however, traceable aesthetic links between members of the group throughout the 1970s and 1980s. A multi-directional discussion went on, sometimes intermittently, between the early 1970s and the end of the 1980s, in letters, conversations and in shared public display (parades, exhibitions, shops, museums and galleries), between McDiarmid, Jackson, Tully, Kee and Chai about what was fabulous and where it could be seen, experienced and appropriated into life or work.

Craft political discourse

Feminist retrieval of traditional women's crafts in the 1970s had the ideological dimension of re-evaluating the historical work of women, making it newly radical, instead of anachronistic. A related aesthetic valuing of the crafted, the decorative and the allegorical was seen in the hand-painted fabrics of McDiarmid, discussed above. Craft discourse and fashionable gay male iconography also gave a context to McDiarmid's gay activist art. McDiarmid saw the retrieval of craft techniques as a political matter; re-valuing work born of different, less powerful subjectivities. His artist statement for a February 1982 exhibition at the Crafts Council of Australia Gallery in Sydney, claimed:

I'm interested in popular culture. My work is in the intersection between folk art, women's art (needlepoint, patchwork quilts) and contemporary materials, I use loud cheap and vulgar plastics to make 'pretty Pictures'.
(1982, n.p.)

For this show, *The Australian Experience — Elements of Change*, McDiarmid, then resident in New York, exhibited his *Man Quilt* (1978) now in the NGV. Using traditional quilting patterns and techniques, the work evokes a public/private homosocial world. The patchwork wall-hanging is meticulously hand-stitched, in the 'abutted and over-stitched', 'English' method of patchwork quilting, using coloured plastic hobby thread. McDiarmid's design, in traditional 'star-block' and 'four-patch' quilting patterns, uses repeat images of handsome 'clones', the then dominant gay male sartorial and grooming stereotype. Fragments of the *Pink Personals* columns from the *Advocate*, a San Francisco gay paper, and fragments of red and black bandannas, signalling sexual-practice codes, make up the rest of the patchwork patterns. McDiarmid saw himself primarily as an artist but, as he says above, he was happy to place himself in the spaces between craft and art. He worked on various specifically fashion projects between the mid 1970s and the early 1990s, including, but not limited to, the collaborations with Jackson discussed above (Gray, 2010).

Both the craft revival and the community arts movement were linked to the rejection of dominant Western values relating to class, gender, race and sexuality. Work such as *Man Quilt*, and the community arts discourse which informed both Tully and McDiarmid's tenures as artistic directors of the Sydney

Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, coalesced with New Left counter-cultural ideas about identity and subjectivity which had also influenced the craft revival. Tully was Mardi Gras workshop artist and artistic director from 1982 until 1986 and McDiarmid from 1988 to 1990.

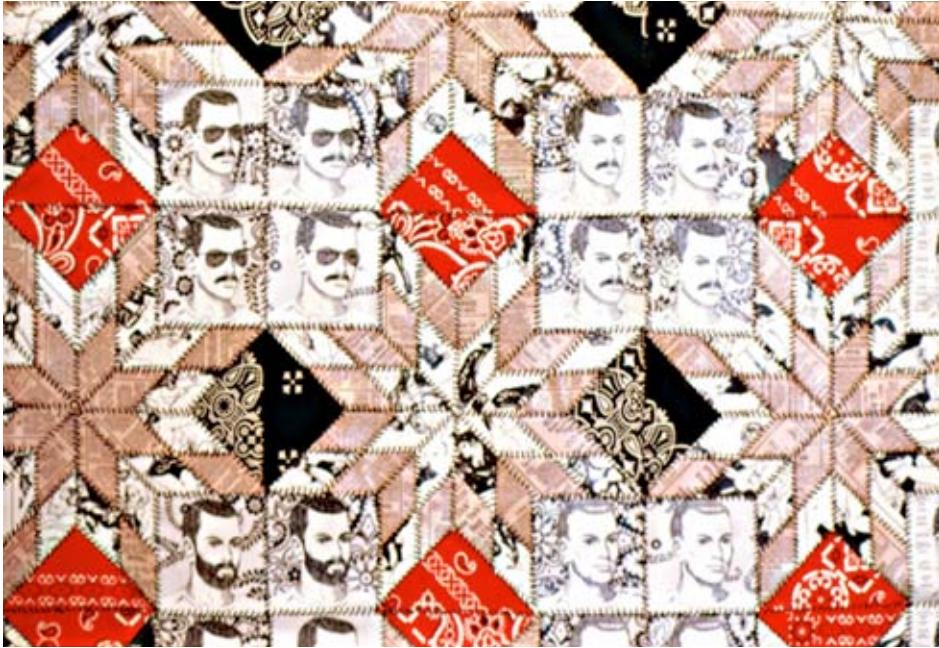


Figure 9. David McDiarmid, *Man Quilt* (detail), 1978. Hand-stitched patchwork wall-hanging, vinyl, plastic, cotton, paper, chrome (145.8 x 120 cm).

Source: David McDiarmid.

Collecting and exhibiting

Collecting and exhibiting policies in some Australian museums and galleries in the 1970s and 1980s embraced a looser approach to classification and ranking of art forms, and included craft and decorative arts. This energised the exhibiting and collecting of the work of this group. The directions taken at the ANG and the re-opened Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences in Sydney (as the Powerhouse Museum in 1988) would be important. In Canberra, James Mollison, later the national gallery's first director, was, as exhibitions officer in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, the first full-time professional force behind the development of a collecting philosophy for Australia's nascent national gallery, as it moved towards its opening in 1982.

Born and raised in Victoria, Mollison traces the origins of his visual sensibility, in part, to the NGV collection. He said in a 2003 interview:

I grew up in Melbourne. The National Gallery of Victoria contains marvellous prints and drawings, decorative arts and photography at least equal in quality to the collection of paintings. It never occurred to me that some things were better than others because of their category. (2003, p. 23)

John McPhee, founding curator of Australian decorative arts at the ANG, and Robyn Healy, who became curator of fashion and theatre arts there, both agree that there was an unusually open and interdisciplinary atmosphere surrounding the ANG's collecting, researching and exhibiting in its early years. 'What was done in Canberra was quite deliberate', says McPhee (2010). The specifically national role of the gallery was seen as being, not simply about canons of painting and sculpture, but also about providing a contemporary national picture; collecting objects and research material which could stimulate creativity and production in a variety of Australian visual practices. As Healy says of the acquisition of the significant Julian Robinson (fashion and textile) collection in 1976: 'It was seen as important, not just in terms of exhibiting, but also as a research collection' (2010). McPhee was among the earliest curators to recognise and interpret the decorative and symbolic languages employed by this group of practitioners and he made early acquisitions of their work. One of the earliest was the 1980 commission, for the ANG, of Tully's *Ceremonial Coat for the Grand Diva of the Paradise Garage*. This vibrant wearable object fabricated from DayGlo-coloured plastics, vinyls, fun-fur and found objects, was inspired by Tully's and McDiarmid's experience on the dance floor of the New York underground, black and Hispanic dance club, Paradise Garage (Gray, 2007, 2011). There were no exact precedents for the ANG's interdisciplinary collecting of Australian decorative arts and unclassifiables such as the grand diva's coat.

Even things like writing of labels took endless hours of discussion, there were no real published catalogues of the [objects] we were collecting. The V&A for example would have regarded what we were collecting as beneath them. (McPhee, 2010)

Interdisciplinary categorisations of objects thus made openings for the collecting and exhibiting of a variety of Australian creative practice. As the Powerhouse Museum moved towards its 1988 re-opening, in new premises, a collection initiative to make up for years of neglect of modernist and postmodernist craft and decorative arts collecting was underway, assisted by funds from the Crafts Board of the Australia Council and MOJO MDA (Varley, 1988). This was accelerated by the planned exhibition *A Free Hand: Forty years of Australian Crafts 1940s–1980s*, which aimed to include contemporary work from the burgeoning interdisciplinary crafts scene. The catalogue for this exhibition noted that: 'As the boundaries between all art forms are blurred, the boundaries of craft practice have extended' (Cochrane, 1989). Tully, Jackson and McDiarmid were collected and exhibited at the Powerhouse under this rubric.



Figure 10. Linda Jackson (left), Peter Tully (centre) and Jenny Kee (right) at the opening of the Australian National Gallery, Canberra, 1982.

Source: William Yang.

Fashion, art, design, craft: Interdisciplinary exhibitions

I was interested in the really hip, the contemporary people who were working in dress, as just one of the ways they were working, or it might have been the main way they were working. (Jane de Teliga, 2011)

A special cultural framing for the critical interpretation and popular reception of the work of this group of practitioners was also provided by key inter-disciplinary fashion exhibitions curated by Jane de Teliga in the 1980s. The first of these was *Art Clothes* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) (1980–81). It included Jackson, Kee, Tully, McDiarmid and 12 others whose practice covered jewellery, various approaches to clothing and personal adornment, and hand-painted and printed textiles. This was followed by *Art Knits*, also at the AGNSW, in 1988. The contemporary influence of these two exhibitions can hardly be overestimated. They popularised the idea of inter-disciplinary visual creativity for the body. The easily assimilated ‘art-clothes’ language was communicated on a national level through the canvassing of work for *Art Knits* from all over Australia and through the national publicity generated by the projects.

The popular success of de Teliga’s first two Australian fashion exhibitions was followed by the larger and more ambitious *Australian Fashion: The Contemporary Art of 1989–90*, which she proposed to, and curated for, the

Powerhouse Museum. This widely applauded exhibition was shown at the Twentieth Century Gallery of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, Marimura Art Museum in Tokyo and the Shinsegae department store in Seoul, as well as at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney. A handsome catalogue, with photography by Monty Coles, was produced by *Vogue Australia*, which partnered with the exhibition to celebrate its 30th anniversary. The financing of Art Knits and Australian Fashion: The Contemporary Art by state and national Bicentennial funds invited a resonance with national iconography and cultural nationalism, as well as with craft and other contemporary discourses (feminism, gay liberation), and helped make the three exhibitions a cultural force.

Small 'project' exhibitions, organised by McPhee and Healy at the ANG, also placed the work of these practitioners in an interdisciplinary context in which categories of craft, art and fashion resonated. Linda Jackson and Jenny Kee: Flamingo Park and Bush Couture (1985) showed selected examples of Jackson's and Kee's work, including fabrics painted by McDiarmid, and jewellery by Tully, most of which had been acquired by the ANG in the early 1980s. Plastic, Rubber and Leather: Alternative Dress and Decoration (1986), also developed by McPhee and Healy, and including work by Tully, Jackson and McDiarmid, noted the blurring of 'distinctions between art, craft and fashion' and saw the roles of artist, craftsperson and fashion designer becoming more 'interchangeable' (McPhee, 1986).

Conclusion

This essay traces some of the ways in which friendships, formed around shared aesthetic sensibilities, can influence both the nature of those friendships themselves, and the creative outputs of the respective individuals. I have shown how five young Australians — Jackson, Kee, McDiarmid, Tully and Chai — shared one-to-one and inter-connected group friendships, a visual enthusiasm for early twentieth-century decorative modernisms, and ideas about modes of making which they brought to bear on their creative work in art and fashion. They, variously, lived together, worked together, presented their work together and shared business relationships. They were all widely travelled, with an eclectic approach to absorbing influences from the world's cultures. Radical and counter-cultural ideas, including in the case of Tully and McDiarmid a specific agenda for social change, provided a background atmosphere to the friendships, and creative practice, of all five, as they sought to create lives and work that were vibrant, irreverent and exciting. The reception of their work was influenced by the aesthetic sensibility of a number of influential curators, namely Mollison, McPhee, de Teliga, and Healy, and by related discourses around inter-disciplinarity in visual culture. These interdisciplinary discourses brought craft, design, art, fashion and politics into new relational configurations, providing momentum for both the group's output and for their popular and institutional reception.

Sally Gray is an independent curator. She recently co-curated David McDiarmid a Short History of Facial Hair at the Fashion Space Gallery, London College of Fashion (2011) and is guest curator of the (2014–15) David McDiarmid retrospective at the NGV. She wrote her PhD (UNSW 2006) on the life and work of David McDiarmid. She is an Australian Postdoctoral Fellow (2010–12) at the University of NSW, writing a book on Sydney fashionability in the 1970s and 1980s.

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Two tenants of Number 9 Collins Street: Tom Roberts and Kate Keziah Eeles

Juliette Peers

Abstract: Number 9 Collins Street Grosvenor Chambers was claimed to be the first building in Australia that was intentionally built for creative professionals. Until being 'façaded' in the 1980s, the tenants' list of the building was glamorous and romantic, with several generations of famous names in art and fashion and other creative industries making the building their base.

This paper focuses on the contrast in reputation and output between two late nineteenth-century tenants of Number 9 Collins Street: Tom Roberts the painter and Kate Eeles the couturier. Whilst *Shearing the rams* was being painted an ambitious Salon de Couture operated from a floor below. This is a strange and exciting modification of our understanding of the iconic nationalist artworks of the 1880s and 1890s. That we cannot place the artworks of Roberts and Eeles alongside one another and acknowledge their respective singularity as equally worthy of professional attention indicates the limiting effects arising from our peculiar cultural nationalism.

Robert's works have been meticulously documented in a catalogue raisonné and his life in a detailed biography, but currently only a few very high quality items have turned up in public collections with Eeles's label. Surviving examples of their work testify to their outstanding levels of talent in their respective fields, and like Roberts, Eeles was an innovator, who brought new ideas to Melbourne. She went on scoping/forecasting tours to London and Paris to ensure that her customers were indeed being presented with up-to-date styles from the fashion meccas.

Yet conversely the two artists may not be so disparate, for Eeles's finely crafted and current styles recall the schizophrenic nature of Roberts's practice with his urban-based portrait studies forming a significant section of his work during highpoint of his career from 1885–1900. Those of women reveal an intense interest in contemporary fashion. With his attention to the quality of his own clothes, Roberts may well have been in the late 1880s more alert than subsequent cultural professionals in Australia to the professional activities of his co-tenant.

The discussion of the relationship between art and craft could be assumed to be a twentieth and twenty-first century debate triggered by various theoreticisations and defences of 'craft' in Australia. Intense discussion around 'craft' at various periods in Australian has been most notably triggered by the 'Craft Movement' of the 1970s.¹ Another more recent phase of debate has arisen in the wake

¹ Craft Australia designated 2010 as the 40th anniversary of the 'Australian Studio Craft Movement', noting that '[a]lthough craft practice in this country precedes the 1970s, this date marks a flourish of activity due to new funding possibilities.' 'Celebrating craft and design landmarks' (Craft Australia Editorial) http://www.craftaustralia.org.au/library/editorial.php?id=celebrating-craft_and_design_landmarks [online] viewed July 2011.

of 'design' being identified as a means of integrating 'creativity' into modern political and economic agendas and a means for garnering creative activities some vestigial honour in an agora increasingly dominated by economic rationalism. However this paper will examine an older — and still virtually forgotten — Australian juxtaposition of fine art — respectable and accepted — to the less known and only partially acclaimed materially-based practices of craft and design. The relationship that is here outlined is the simple one of physical/geographical/urban proximity and it will be charted in an empirical and descriptive manner. Yet even with such direct conceptualisation and methodology the juxtaposition raises questions of a more theoretical, political and conceptual bent.

The relationship between art and craft is personified by two tenants of a particular Melbourne building in 1888 — Grosvenor Chambers in Collins Street — who contributed greatly to its reputation for artistic and social cachet amongst Melbournians during the land boom: the well-known artist Tom Roberts and the couturier Mrs Eeles, representing respectively fine arts and design. In the 1880s these two practitioners marked the beginning of the extended history of the proximity and interaction of art, craft and design within this one building. This history lasted until the middle of the twentieth century and evidence of this history up to the 1950s will be presented in this essay. The juxtaposition of Roberts and Eeles is not mere curious coincidence, but informs 80 years of art, craft and design activities in Melbourne. Given the fact that much historical and theoretical literature on visual culture in Australia has stressed the fine arts at the expense of design — the tenancies of this single building document the fact that these two fields of creativity were at least physically in closer proximity than the silos of historical memory would suggest.

The building itself reminds us that place has become an important driving issue in the discussion of living and present-day design. Writers such as Bradley Quinn (2003) have established links between design, especially fashion, and both the physical urban environment and the more intangible expression of an ethos of 'place' that resonate at an academic curatorial level and also in terms of popular cultural understandings of urban social life. Fashion in particular has been looked at in terms of its place of origin. A number of books on fashion and the site of its production have been published recently, including an anthology *Fashion's World Cities* and a range of studies covering cities such as London and Paris and the fashion of both nations such as Japan and regions such as South America. In writing a historical overview of the trope of 'Paris fashion', Agnès Rocamora presents a more critical view of this linkage between place and design, suggesting that it has been developed consciously by the extended network of the French fashion industry for 'legitimising' the rule of Paris as global fashion arbitrator. Her argument does suggest that this sense of place evoked in the concept of 'Paris fashion' has a relational aspect in that it references not only a tangible material reality but also simultaneously a less tangible constructed vision of place, 'the city as imagined', and the two concepts of the city interact and are productive in tandem. Indeed she argues that the suggestive effect of

the phantom city is as real as the physical city (2009, pp. 185–87). In a series of texts, which have been much cited over the last decade, Richard Florida has proposed an even more dynamic and causal relationship between place and object. No longer merely the art historical and curatorial organising taxonomy of national ‘schools’, nor even the branding cachet of the place of origin, be it Paris Fashion or Scandinavian Design, Florida claims it is a demonstrable economic and geographical fact that design and creative industry professionals often tend to cluster in particular locations. They favour cities where there are a number of social conditions including a high existing proportion of people with creative qualifications, social tolerance of diversity and available technologies and resources, ‘the three t’s of economic growth: technology, talent and tolerance’ (2005, p. 6). Via Grosvenor Chambers and Mrs Eeles and Roberts, place can also be a point of sense making in discussing historic, pre-twentieth century Australian art and craft. Certainly the consolidation discussed by Florida as a new cultural and economic phenomenon in the early twenty-first century had already taken place by the second quarter of the twentieth century on an intimate scale in Melbourne within the upper eastern reaches of Collins Street, where artists, photographers, fashion retailers, smart hotels, clubs and cafes all gathered — the so-called ‘Paris end’ of Collins Street (Van Wyk, 2006, pp. 11–13). Moreover the activities, tenants and businesses of Grosvenor Chambers had already brokered the association of Collins Street east with activities associated with ‘style’, ‘art’ and ‘design’ in the 1880s.

Grosvenor Chambers and its tenants

The building is undoubtedly ‘star’ of the central conceit of comparison between two of its late 1880s tenants. Number 9 Collins Street, Grosvenor Chambers, is without exaggeration the building most closely and consistently associated with visual practice and the arts industries in Australia. Famed as the first purpose-built artists’ studios designed in Australia, it was opened to the public in April 1888. The top floor studios and their special effects of light, via siting of windows and painting of the colours on the walls, were designed in consultation with Roberts and other notable artists of the period.² The society journal *Table Talk* claimed in 1889 that Roberts’s studio was ‘one of the best in Melbourne’.³ ‘No. 9 Collins Street quickly became famed in art circles’ (Henty, 1937, p. 11).

Grosvenor Chambers was an amalgam of radical British culture and the romance of Parisian *vie de bohème*. In its name Grosvenor Chambers directly referenced the Grosvenor Gallery of London — representatives of all things artistic and radical at the time of the aesthetic movement in the 1880s (Newall, 1995). ‘[T]he gallery’s celebrity was equally a result of the controversy that surrounded the contemporary artists, ... influential figures in the British art world, who, nevertheless rarely exhibited at the Royal Academy’ (Inglis, 2008). The Grosvenor

² *Argus*, 26 April 1888, p. 8.

³ *Table Talk*, 26 April 1889, p. 5.

Gallery was the key display point for non-canonical British art, which often placed itself outside the Royal Academy system. This alternative centre offered by the Grosvenor Gallery contributed substantially to a brief flowering of avant-garde art and design of international repute, which exceeded accustomed mainstream norms and inspired the emergence of a European avant-garde movement in applied art. 'Such was the fame of the Grosvenor Gallery that audiences as far away as Melbourne were soon familiar with its activities, not only from serious exhibition reviews in British and local art journals, but also from its caricaturing in the popular press' (Inglis, 2008).

With its top-lighted studios on its top floor designed with art practice in mind, the cosmopolitan Melbourne resident could also dream of Parisian studio life.⁴ However, the Grosvenor Chambers artists in 1888 did not live in romantic poverty, but were 'nearly as comfortably disposed as a bank manager, with all [their] wants anticipated and supplied. An ante room nicely furnished for arriving visitors, a studio within, almost as rich in decoration and upholstery as a dentist's or photographer's room ...'.⁵

Downstairs in the semi basement, which was underground at Collins Street and above ground on Flinders Lane, was Australia's first purpose-built sculpture studio with extra high ceilings and large barnlike doors for moving full-sized sculptures in and out:

... the fall of the ground enables [the sculptor's] floor to be above the surface of the lane and yet allows him a clear height in the room of over 20ft, so that the most lofty groups may be modelled in the room without difficulty. The whole of the south end is occupied by a wide doorway and window, and the fanlight over the doors can be removed at will, giving an opening from the lane nearly 7ft wide by the whole height of the room. This is useful for the removal of large pieces of sculpture, such as that on which Mr Ball is at present engaged. The remainder of the basement consists of a spacious cellar, having access by stone stairs both to Collins Street and the lane. The cellar is lighted from Collins Street with Hayward's patent prismatic pavement and stallboard lights.⁶

The first tenant to rent this purpose-built sculptural studio was Percival Ball, and the space was later used in the interwar period by artist Septimus Power for his equestrian portraits (Henty, 1937, p. 11), the large doors and access to Flinders Lane serving horses as well as they served monumental sculptures.

Grosvenor Chambers was a favoured address for many generations of Melbourne artists. The tenants were a who's who of Melbourne art, both radical and conservative. It was built by Charles Paterson, a member of the Heidelberg School circle (Lane, 2010, p. 41). The first tenants included Roberts, the academic portrait painter James C. Waite, and a highly talented but short-lived

4 Fullerton (1988, pp. 26–27) notes the popularity of the fantasy of Parisian studio life in Melbourne during the 1890s. 'Like the contemporary opera *La bohème*, Trilby lent a certain glamour to the bohemian life led by artists.' Cf Taylor (2007, pp. 38–41) on the Australian fascination with the image of Parisian art life via Trilby.

5 *Argus*, 24 April 1888, p. 5.

6 *Argus*, 26 April 1888, p. 8.

artist, George Walton. The latter's broad brushwork and tonal division in colour application and the confidence of his portrait work strongly resembles Roberts at the same period.⁷ Ball, who rented the basement, had the most credible professional reputation of all sculptors in Australia prior to the emergence of Bertram Mackennal as an internationally renowned sculptor during the 1890s. Ball had a solid career in Britain, was a regular exhibitor at the Royal Academy, and provided decorative sculptures for the North Façade of the Victoria and Albert Museum. Before coming to Australia for the sake of his health, his studio was based in Rome and he was in the friendship circle of American painter and sculptor Elihu Vedder (Soria, 1970, p. 90).

Jane Sutherland, Clara Southern and Jane Price, the major female plein-air artists, came to Number 9 when it opened and would often lend their studio to Roberts so he could entertain in a suite of rooms (Jane Price, quoted in Croll, 1935, p. 150). Arthur Streeton was also in residence in the early 1890s (Topliss, 1985, p. 33). Other tenants include E. Phillips Fox during the 1890s, John Longstaff for two periods, firstly in the 1890s and later in the 1920s, Janie Wilkinson Whyte in the early 1900s, Norah Wilkie in the 1910s, Louis McCubbin, son of Fred, in the 1930s, the major modernist sculptor Ola Cohn in the 1920s and 1930s, and tonal painters Polly Hurry and John Farmer in the 1930s. During the Second World War, thanks to Hurry, Number 9 Collins Street became the Melbourne Society of Women Painters and Sculptors' volunteer headquarters. At this venue they made and sold handcrafts and art to raise money for the war effort, including knitting a herculean 2000 garments (Taylor, 2007, p. 25). The women also learned and practised first aid drills in case of wartime need, as documented by Sybil Craig's gouache in the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra. In the postwar period George and Mirka Mora rented space at Number 9 Collins Street which became not only their café, but also the centre for gatherings of their friends in the Melbourne art scene, such as John Percival and the Antipodean group. Émigré photographer Wolfgang Sievers also worked out of Grosvenor Chambers, after Lady Maie Casey had located space there for him (Taylor, 2007, p. 25).

Writing design history via Grosvenor Chambers and its tenants

Juxtaposing two tenants of Grosvenor Chambers, Roberts and Eeles, sets up a series of polar relationships: iconic versus unknown, fine art versus design and applied art, male versus female, nationalist versus cosmopolitan, oil painting versus fashion. These simple dialectics offer a broad-brush overview of the construction of the main assumptions of evaluating art. One half of these paradigms are familiar to visual cultural scholars, the other half is, in terms of mainstream historical narrative, more inaccessible and fragmentary. The historiography of decorative arts, design, craft and material culture is

⁷ As documented in Clark and Whitelaw (1986, p. 80), one of the few recent sources to depict the work of Walton.

fragmented and fraught in Australia, and certainly lags behind the professional attention paid to easel painting (McNeill, 2011). Material cultural studies in Australia also tend to be strongly dominated by dealers, collector-dealers and specialist curators (McNeill, 2011). This greater proportion of researchers not based in academia means that there is perhaps a lower level of publication in academic journals and a greater degree of policing of turf boundaries, because a publicly shared/known narrative of Australian design history is not circulated as widely through the undergraduate curriculum as is 2-D painting and fine arts history. Whereas this corralling and fragmentation of information was true of the fine arts in the mid twentieth century, art theory, digitisation of information and an increasing awareness of the opportunities and rights offered via publicly available information have allowed the painted image to escape from the secure stockade of institutional or capitalist ownership. With the decorative arts, design and craft, given the more patchy institutional holdings, access to primary sources in Australia — especially historic objects — themselves remains difficult.⁸ Due to the lack of a well-documented and visible canon, many professionals and academics do not realise the complexity of the high fashion industries that emerged in Australia during the 1870s, of which Mrs Eeles was clearly an early star.

Via Grosvenor Chambers tenancies further artistic relationships can be seen: Roberts with his artist neighbours Sutherland, Southern and Price. These artists are already marked — in the eyes of the modern investment art marketplace (Ellis, 2007) and still to a great extent in curatorial practice — by their not-good-enough-ness, their ‘weakness’, their derivativeness (Peers, 1999, 2005). Such assessments may be generalisations, but these problematic mainstream truisms can be interrogated and challenged through scholarship (e.g. McNeill, 2011; Ellis, 2007; Jordan, 2007; Peers, 1999, 2005; Kerr, 1996). Furthermore, the lack of status of these women artists can be allied with another even greater case study of neglect: that of Eeles. To the present day all four women are so poorly documented in the public record that even though they worked day to day in the same building, there is no current documentation that indicates what they thought of each other. Another tenant of Grosvenor Chambers, who arrived a little after the building’s grand opening, Madame Masseran, a corsetiere, styled herself ‘*artiste en corsets*’ in her press advertisements. What the artists painting in oils (both male and female) upstairs thought of the ground floor tenant’s appropriation of such a title is also unknown, although Masseran’s pride in her status is unmistakable.

We can also draw some points of similarity between Roberts and Eeles. Both were ambitious artistic professionals with a commitment to a showy performed

8 Due to fragility, and the need to limit exposure to handling and light, historic fashion items are particularly hard to access and study in Australia. Whilst British twentieth-century costume curating practices have been adopted in Australia, a key element — the accessibility of dress collections for informed outsiders (often, in the United Kingdom, genteel amateurs as well as academics and design students) — has not translated to Australian practice. Private collectors generally tend to seek out and recognise more recent Australian labels than those from the 1880s and 1890s, preferring a post-1950 vision of high fashion. Institutional interest and energy in research, publishing and collecting generally also favours this more recent period of fashion in Australia.

competency that was also dependent for validation upon an informed, admiring audience. Both consciously brought into question artistic competency and auteurship, as understood by their public, and showed how, in the nineteenth century, this performance of the assured, instinctive self-promoting creative artist circulated around the aspirational avant-garde, from fine arts to fashion. Both also speak of the sophistication of urban life in the hothouse of 1880s Melbourne, and how this urban life could nurture creative practices of skill and energetic ambition in both high art and design.

Robert's career has been investigated in great detail (Topliss, 1985; McQueen, 1996), but what is important is the role of Grosvenor Chambers — as much as the camps at Box Hill and Heidelberg — as a stage in which he could 'perform' Tom Roberts. His famous invitation card for the opening of Grosvenor Chambers (Topliss, 1985, p. 28) supposedly spoke of artlessness and rural simplicity: an Australian version of Rousseau in which an unbearded youth — certainly not the bearded Roberts in his expensive suits⁹ or the mustachio-ed Streeton — but an avatar in working-class, lax, unstyled clothes (notably a sloppy hat), painting a large canvas strung between two gum saplings. The subject is a vision of artistically inflected humility, genius yet demurral, but also a fantasy of artistic production, that overwrote the smart urban context in which Roberts finished and sold his paintings with an arcadian vision of a young lower-class male out in the bush. This image of proletarian youth and handsomeness did not, however, correspond with the clientele that he intended to attract to his studio: the card asks for guests to attend in 'evening dress'. It was a male evening only, a 'smoke night', even though the *Argus* pointed out when reviewing the event that all nights were smoke nights for men.¹⁰

It was into this same city studio that Roberts brought the bush in the form of gum blossom and gum leaves (Nancy Elmhurst Goode, quoted in Croll, 1935, p. 159). *Shearing the Rams* was painted here and first exhibited to the public.¹¹ Yet concurrently, this studio was also marked as a space of European ambition with a collection of artefacts including paintings from London and Spain, art muslin on the wall, a Venus torso on the mantelpiece, a Doulton bowl, a pipe organ — that sign of *ne plus ultra* of chic in Melbourne. Latest editions of overseas art journals were read and discussed in public *conversaciones* at Roberts's studio. Here Melbourne artists began the practice of *conversaciones* and open studios for the fashionable and well connected to visit. 'The number of people in Melbourne interested in art is large, if one may judge by the throng that climbed the four flights of stairs in the Grosvenor Chambers in Collins Street to reach

9 D.H. Souter recalled that 'he was the only one of us who dressed properly' — quoted in Croll (1935, p. 40).

10 *Argus*, 24 April 1888, p. 5. An abridged account of this event was also published in the *Australasian Sketcher*, 17 May 1888, p. 71; the smoke night was organised by C.S. Paterson and his male artist tenants to advertise the new building and the artists who worked there. From the article it would suggest that as well as viewing the studios on the top floor, the male guests went downstairs to a large empty room to hold a concert and a lively male-only dance. Possibly this space was Mrs Eeles's salon before the professional fit-out.

11 *Argus*, 24 June 1890, p. 6.

Mr Roberts's large and well-lighted studio.¹² The regional culture of nearby Asia was as equally celebrated as Europe's — Indonesian batik, sea-grass furniture and matting, oriental china, Japanese lanterns.¹³

Conversely what do we know of Mrs Eeles? She was a dressmaker whose label with a coat of arms and the magical address of 9 Collins Street may be found on a handful of garments in public collections in various states of preservation. The chief of her currently known garments is a superb, embroidered bodice, remarkable for its excellent state of preservation, in the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. What is notable in this example is the sensuous aspects of the sheen of the satin and the contrast of the delicate web of the chiffon trim — so often lost or rotted. The physical delicacy and translucency of net and tulle itself was, for the Victorians since the vision of Taglioni's *La Sylphide* in 1830, shorthand for the purity and fragility of the ideal woman, who was not embodied flesh but idealised spirit. The floral embroidery also reminds us of the link of woman to nature, woman to flower in Ruskinian symbolism. It is almost rococo revival, but just tempered by a botanical naturalism of the flower heads, and also a certain hint of art nouveau abstraction in the languid curves and interchanges. Like many nineteenth- and early twentieth-century dresses, its matching skirt has disappeared. Skirts often became separated from bodices to be remade and recut.

We can build up a picture of Mrs Eeles from certain newspaper advertisements. She started her business lower down in Collins Street early in the 1880s, as both advertisements and dress labels document. Around April 1888, she moved into the newly built Grosvenor Chambers, where her business took up the whole of the first floor.¹⁴

During the 1880s she travelled overseas to bring back sample gowns and novelties from Europe, Paris and London, as attested by classified advertisements.¹⁵ She is one of at least four women in Australia who by the late nineteenth century were making such forecasting trips. Sourcing first-hand information of new styles via buying trips was typical of the mid- and late-twentieth-century fashion industry, but such practices have a much longer history than usually assumed in Australia. Other Australian women making similar trips to Europe to obtain up-to-date and first-hand knowledge of fashion in the late nineteenth century were fellow Grosvenor Chamber tenant, Masseran, couturier Janet Walker of Brisbane, and paper-pattern queen and fashion magazine publisher Johanna Weigel of Melbourne (Peers, 2010, pp. 111–13).

12 *West Australian*, 16 May 1888, p. 3.

13 Taylor (2007, pp. 17–19) reproduces a number of images of Roberts's studio both paintings and photographs.

14 *Argus*, 26 April 1888, p. 8.

15 *Argus*, 3 September 1887, p. 8.

Fashion in Grosvenor Chambers and Mrs Eeles

As with fine artists, Grosvenor Chambers consistently attracted fashion-based tenants over half a century, even though by the 1930s Louis McCubbin was occupying part of Mrs Eeles's former first-floor premises.¹⁶ The corsetiere Masseran was also a tenant.¹⁷ She too was positioned at the summit of Melbourne's fashion businesses and boasted an exclusive clientele. Although, as with Mrs Eeles, she is now obscure in historical memory, details of her career can be garnered from an advertisement in which she claims to have worked for a London corsetiere, Madame Olivier Rolland, who supplied the Princess of Wales. She described herself in 1896 as an '*artiste en corsets*'.¹⁸ This claim validates the conjunction of couturier Mrs Eeles with Roberts by suggesting that elite members of the Australian fashion industry in the late nineteenth century did see themselves as 'artists', and thus high end fashion as an 'art'. Like Roberts, Masseran could boast Vice Regal patronage. The connection of Grosvenor Chambers with fashion continued beyond the era of Roberts and the plein-air group. In 1922 a dressmaker on the ground-floor showrooms of Grosvenor Chambers was robbed of over £1000 worth of stock,¹⁹ a considerable sum at that date, suggesting an elite business. Mavis Ripper, who was renowned as one of Australia's most gifted couturiers in the years leading up to the Second World War, had a studio there in the 1930s (Peers, 2010, p. 112).

Mirka Mora brought the building's two genealogies of art and fashion (and thus craft/design/applied art) together in the 1950s. At that date she was living in Grosvenor Chambers and working as a dressmaker with clients referred from a sales assistant in Georges department store (Beier, 1980, p. 13). Mora's dressmaking work followed the favourite Australian practice, endemic it was said in the 1930s to all classes (Peers, 2010, p. 101), of passing off locally made garments as French couture (cf Jents, 1993, pp. 52, 55). By her own admission, Mora was not trained as a dressmaker and often worked by trial and error, even sending her husband to dressmaking classes to find out about technical details undercover. She was born in Paris, however, and that gave her credibility enough for Australian customers. Sunday Reed employed Mora first as a dressmaker (Beier, 1980, pp. 13–14) rather than spotting her talent for art. John Reed met Mirka and Georges Mora when picking up a dress that had been made for Sunday (Taylor, 2007, p. 25). Thus it was that fashion connections and fashion business led to a new and important chapter in the Reeds' ongoing patronage of Melbourne artists and also launched both Mirka and Georges Mora as important fixtures on the contemporary art scene in Melbourne. The Mora family continues to be influential in Melbourne art six decades later. The confluence of histories of fashion design and art which centre on Grosvenor Chambers as late as the 1950s suggests that 'high' art (intellectual, cerebral)

16 See 'Exhibition of oil paintings by Louis McCubbin: held at the studio, 1st floor, Grosvenor Chambers, 9 Collins Street, Melbourne: open daily from the 28th April to 13th May, 1933, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.'

17 *Argus*, 20 November 1902, p. 2.

18 *West Australian*, 16 December 1896, p. 3.

19 *Argus*, 20 March 1922, p. 6.

and craft (of the hand) and design (of the market/client) have had, at least at basic level, a longer proximity in Australia than is usually credited by accepted narratives.

When thinking of the different positioning of Mrs Eeles and Roberts in professional historical imaginations we should note that in booming prosperous Melbourne of the 1880s, Eeles's studio was not seen as irrelevant but as a matter for civic congratulation. The book *Victoria and its Metropolis* of 1888 praised her 'handsome showrooms, a dark room for the exhibition of silks and the display of gaslight effects, also a large factory capable of accommodating upwards of forty employees and filled with appliances as necessary for such an establishment in conformity with municipal legislation' (Alexander Sutherland, quoted in Lane, 2007, p. 147). Fashion was here seen to represent neither folly nor the trivial concerns of female minds, but civic pride, mercantile initiative and the steadfast beneficence of capitalism in boom-time Melbourne, through the conformity of Mrs Eeles's workroom to 'municipal legislation'. The validation of Mrs Eeles's enterprise again highlights the notion of nineteenth-century Melbourne as a 'world city' in its era, with its complex and now largely forgotten nineteenth-century 'fashion culture' (Peers, 2010, pp. 103–04).

Humphrey MacQueen suggests that Mrs Eeles's 40 or more female staff could have provided Roberts with 'suitable subjects for an artist's eye or his compliments' (McQueen, 1996, p. 43). The difference between the brief treatment of Mrs Eeles's undertaking as a site of romantic diversion and the encyclopedic detail of his tracking of Roberts's many professional activities is obvious. McQueen does not make any comment about the size of the undertaking (owned by a woman) or about the client base in Melbourne and colonial Australia that could support an elite dressmaking studio with upwards of 40 employees. Conversely, representing a different generation of historians and a new modality of history writing that no longer seems to be obliged to erase middle- and upper-class cultural presences in Australia, Alex Taylor takes Mrs Eeles's atelier more seriously and discusses her famed *salon de lumière* — where dress fabrics could be tested under totally artificial lighting to gain an understanding of how they performed during an evening social event. He sees Mrs Eeles's business and its resources as proof that 'performing the artist' had always in Melbourne an aspect of commercial acumen and commercial promotion (2007, p. 16). For Taylor, Mrs Eeles's sales and promotion facilities represent an essential but often intentionally overlooked aspect of the 'fine arts'.

Mentioning commerce via Mrs Eeles's innovative showroom again throws up the anxiously policed demarcation between 'fine art' and object-related practices. The latter are never exempt from the shadow of capitalism and the commodity and thus not seen to be as worthy of commendation as 'art'. One could turn to the remarkable denunciation of fashion — specifically — in relation to the *virtu* of 'fine art' by German-American Benjamin Buchloh and his colleague Yves Alain Bois. 'What had irreconcilably divided avant-garde practice and fashion production had been the radical aesthetic, social, and political character of the former' (1997). Both particularly fear fashion's 'vapid menace' and 'empty

promise' (1997) in relation to the acknowledged value of 'art' or the 'avant garde'. Yet valuing art for its intellectual and revolutionary potentials is also about erasing the presence of the object in art. The object can problematise painting with its association not only of the sordid exchange of money and the low-brow commodity, but also for its grounding in artisanship and physical skill, as much as the world of ideas. Roberts's famous pronouncement,

A man may be able to paint decently well and also know how to comport himself in good society. Besides you don't as a rule sell your stuff to people who rent cottages at seventeen and six. (Souter, quoted in Croll, 1935, p. 40)

reveals him to be as concerned with the image and income stream of his clients as any more commercially orientated organisation such as Mrs Eeles's *maison*. His love of fashionable, quality male dress suggests that this concern for image and status extended to personal presentation.

In one way the relationship between 'art' and material practices such as design and craft is very clear following on from the cues given by the weighting of professional historical activities in Australia: Robert's fame has only increased and consolidated down the generations, whereas Mrs Eeles's reputation has diminished greatly. Conversely, in the late nineteenth century Mrs Eeles's name was widely known and had currency independent of the presence of her labelled products. Dressmakers in both rural Victoria and interstate advertised that they were 'late of Mrs Eeles' as proof of their superior status. In the 1890s Mrs Eeles was a 'brand'.

Miss Henderson who has been for a number of years with Mrs Eeles, of Collins Street, Melbourne, which should be a sufficient guarantee that any work entrusted to her will be completed in a thoroughly artistic manner.²⁰

... Miss Ashworth, premier dressmaker. It is almost unnecessary to draw attention to her skill as a fitter and designer, her long experience with Mrs Eeles of Collins-Street Melbourne, in addition to the satisfaction she has given here is a guarantee that patrons will be more than satisfied.²¹

Note that Miss Henderson claimed that her pedigree from Mrs Eeles ensured her work would be 'completed in a thoroughly *artistic manner*' [my italics]. She certainly thought her former employer was an artist, and equally claimed that status for herself working in Camperdown. Again, as so often when researching early Australia fashion practices and also early creative women in Australia, the primary sources provide a different and somewhat more positive perspective than the judgements of much twentieth-century professional scholarship.

Mrs Eeles constantly advertised for staff in Melbourne over a 20-year period from the 1880s to the first decade of the twentieth century, particularly for specialists in skirts or bodices. This subdivision of tasks suggests that her atelier was run along French lines where multiple employees worked simultaneously on

²⁰ *Camperdown Chronicle*, 10 September 1889, p. 10

²¹ *Mercury* (Hobart), 18 June 1895, p. 2

different parts of a dress to ensure that it was finished in relatively quick time. The constant advertisements may mean that there was a turnover of unsatisfactory staff. Conversely, staff may have found Mrs Eeles's establishment uncongenial, although some ex-employees boasted of her training, which suggested that they had positive memories of their workplace. A further possibility is that temporary staff were constantly being hired as turnover demanded. Without further documentation it is difficult to second guess, but there was certainly a pool of professionally trained staff with couture quality skills in turn-of-the-century Melbourne that Eeles sought to communicate with.

Mrs Eeles as innovator

Her *Salon de Lumière* gives us the clearest picture of Mrs Eeles's cultural ambition as a follower of the innovator of the modern 'fashion system', designer Charles Frederick Worth.

At the House, clients could preview evening attire in rooms illuminated by various forms of light — natural light, candlelight, gas lamps, and later, electric bulbs. While the House maintained the usual fitting and modelling rooms, it also offered rooms for fabric selection that were distinguished by colour. An understanding of the play of colours and textures was one of the enduring achievements of the House, and was successfully passed from generation to generation. Charles Worth's sense of colour was particularly noteworthy — he preferred nuanced hues to bold primary colours. (Coleman, 2010)

Worth also subdivided skirt and dress production to enable quicker production and also to maximise diversity given that he had a large client base, many of whom moved in the same circles. The parts of his garments were to a degree modular in design (Coleman, 2010). Mrs Eeles's advertisements seeking specialists in different components of a dress suggest that she followed a similar approach. Whether Mrs Eeles derived her knowledge from London houses that emulated Worth or whether she actually knew and visited Worth is not known, but the Worth structure and intention is clearly visible. Mrs Eeles could have bought dresses as models from Worth from which to make licensed copies in Melbourne, as did American companies. As noted above she hosted showings of dresses and samples from Paris in her atelier, but she does not name the original designers.

Worth not only set up commercial systems, he also established the primacy of the designer above the client in arbitrating stylistic authority and credibility. Thus the designer was not a servant of his or her clients, but exerted a control over the options of taste and choice within the transaction. The client deferred to the professional knowledge of the designer. He is important not only for fashion, but for establishing the current high regard directed towards design and designer goods — there could be no Phillippe Stark, Mark Newsom or the various 'Design Festivals' in Australian capital cities or celebrations of Australian locations such

as Melbourne as a 'Design city' without Worth. His self promotion further speaks of the conversation between art and other practices. Even his photographs indicate how far he had adapted mid-nineteenth-century positioning of the self-contained romantic genius artist into his fashion design business. 'Late-nineteenth-century publicity images of Charles Frederick Worth depict a man who saw himself as an artist, wearing a bow at the neck or a beret. Many of the images of his son Jean-Philippe also show someone intent on conveying an impression of creativity' (Coleman, 2010). "'My mission is to invent: creativity is the secret of my success," he boasted.' (Tungate, 2009, p. 13). Given Roberts's extreme consciousness of the authority of the artist amongst his audience and peers, and given that Roberts is now acknowledged as the driving force behind the professionalism among late-nineteenth-century Australian art circles, Mrs Eeles's apparent positioning of herself as a designer in the manner of Worth suggests a point of contact between the first and second floors of Number 9 Collins Street far more significant than any romantic liaison. Roberts and Eeles appear to have shared a consciousness of radical innovation and strategic self-making. Although far less is known about her, there is evidence that Eeles presented herself as a 'professional', as did Roberts.

The link between the aesthetic and self-positioning of Worth and Mrs Eeles can be upheld. Her possible interest in Worth is corroborated by empirical evidence as she follows his interest in abstract figured jacquard silks. These non-representational and dramatic patterns are generally unconventional in terms of the international corpus of late-nineteenth-century dress,²² and are usually assigned to Worth. They are quite different from the more demure floral, small scale and historical patterns that are the norms amongst most high end fashion designers of the late nineteenth century. A yellow evening cape with Mrs Eeles's label in outstandingly sound condition in the National Trust of Victoria collection shows this type of abstract patterning. Another gown in ivory brocade with an abstract lozenge pattern (possibly from the 1890s, but substantially altered at the time of the Second World War, and also held in the Trust collections), displays the large scale of repeat that is a Worth trademark. Fragments of a striking chartreuse-coloured evening dress, now in fragile condition, suggest the aesthetic power and frisson that evening dresses of eye-catching design could have at the elaborate social events of late-nineteenth-century Melbourne.

Mrs Eeles died a wealthy woman, who had made enough money from her couture house to retire as a 'lady'. Her success was confirmed by the fact that when she died in 1939, she was a resident of the elite Clivedon Mansions in East Melbourne, surrounded by expensive, if conventional, furnishings, including a painting by J.H. Scheltema,²³ a more low brow taste in landscape painting than

22 Coleman (2010) discusses Worth's penchant for large patterns.

23 *Argus*, 25 May 1939, p. 19. Fragments of oral history collected by the National Trust of Victoria suggest that Mrs Eeles trained in Britain — she came out to assist a sister already working as a dressmaker in Melbourne and then branched out with a more successful brand on her own. She paid her girls more than the minimum wages. She had a fashionable clientele including Nellie Melba, with whom she would have stand up rows but who would come back to Mrs Eeles. Her daughter was sent to a private school and was always more beautifully dressed than her peers.

the Heidelberg School, but certainly an admired painter in turn of the century Melbourne. She left a substantial estate in monetary terms too.²⁴ Despite his popularity and high profile in boom-time Melbourne, in later years Roberts never consolidated his finances to such a degree as did Mrs Eeles.

Tom Roberts and fashion

The parallel nature of Eeles's and Roberts's practices as confident self promoters in tune with their elite customers can be further substantiated. Mrs Eeles's world of fashion was equally home territory for Roberts to a degree that is barely acknowledged even today. Roberts was unquestionably a *fashionisto*. Fashion was part of his charisma as much as his painting and 'leadership' skills, and perhaps his love of fashion was synonymous with the qualities for which he is remembered in professional memory.

He was the only one of us who dressed properly ... he was our sole society bohemian ... Chief amongst his sartorial possessions were a crush hat and dress cape lined with red satin. (D.H. Souter, quoted in Croll, 1935, p. 40)²⁵

Charles Conder's *Holiday at Mentone* (1888, Art Gallery of South Australia) demonstrates that chic up-to-date urban male wear was part of the image of the Heidelberg school as much as proletarian or bush dress.²⁶

Robert was not only a consumer of fashion; in marrying Lillie Williamson, Roberts married into 'rag trade' money. His bride had grown up in a family that was kept in comfortable prosperity by the profits of the Craig Williamson drapery business on the corner of Elizabeth Street and Flinders Street in Melbourne. The massive department store Craig Williamson[s] operated from 1873 to 1937. From the 1890s onwards the business occupied a substantial Wilhelmine baroque building, rebuilt after a major fire in 1897 (the year after Roberts married Lillie Williamson) that destroyed many other buildings and businesses abutting the department store.²⁷ During the early 1900s when, in London, Roberts's art career collapsed, the Williamson estate and inheritance (drawn from the department store profits) supported the Roberts household (McQueen, 1996, p. 508).

24 *Argus*, 29 April 1939, p. 13

25 A page of drawings by Alfred Martin Ebsworth from the *Australasian Sketcher*, 17 May 1888, depicting the opening party of Grosvenor Chambers has a prominent figure of an artist with a crush hat under his arm; it may be a portrait of Roberts. <http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/miscpics/gid/slv-pic-aab22611/1/mp010094> [online] [viewed March 2012]

26 Anecdotaly, Margaret Streeton suggested to the author in the 1980s that Arthur Streeton is the young man lying down on the sands and Roberts is the figure in the grey suit on the pier.

27 *Argus*, 22 November 1897, pp. 6–10. There appears to have been an extended Williamson family involved with the drapery trade in both Launceston and Melbourne. A Mr Williamson moved to Melbourne from Launceston in 1848. His Melbourne store later became Hicks Atkinsons (for anecdotal information about the Williamson family see *Argus*, 2 April 1949, p. 4). Lillie Williamson's father Caleb Williamson was in Launceston running a drapery during the 1860s and 1870s (cf McQueen, 1996, p. 54). Lillie was born in Collingwood and historical records document that a Caleb Williamson was a draper in Collingwood in the late 1850s (see the account of a forgery case in 1859 in which he was the victim of a bad cheque, *Argus*, 21 November 1859, p. 6).

One notes that Roberts and also E. Phillips Fox were both close-focused students of contemporary fashion, which they painted with great flair and observation. Was it any accident that both had their studio above a highly successful couture studio of its day? Fox's paintings are particularly informative about the avant-garde, empire-style fashions worn by women in 1890s Melbourne (e.g. *My cousin* 1893–94, National Gallery of Victoria, and 'Marie Torrence', c. 1895, private collection), as well as a faddish dressing of little girls from families within art and design circles in regency-style fashions in the manner of Kate Greenaway (e.g. *Adelaide, daughter of Professor Tucker*, 1895, Art Gallery of New South Wales). The role of fashion in Roberts's vision is hardly considered by historians. Yet he was an outstanding observer of contemporary urban fashion in the period, its forms, surfaces and colours. Fashion featured prominently in his art during the successful years in Australia when he enjoyed great social and professional prominence amongst his peers. The close nexus between promoting art professionalism and making art chic by means of its social and architectural setting — as seen in his instigation of studio *conversazioni* in his modish studio — is also matched by the prominence of fashion in his best portraits from the 1880s and 1890s. Despite his antipodean location, Roberts could be seen as Baudelaire's painter of modern life par excellence (Baudelaire, 1863). The schizoid persona split between the great horse-and-bowyang operas so beloved of his mid-century, left-wing champions and his urban-based portraiture practice is already present in his own invitation card for Grosvenor Chambers, which used a working-class figure to invite guests to a formal reception. Grosvenor Chambers as site of urban creativity and also of urban fashion production linked Roberts to the cultural life of the city and to elite society activities and style in the city.

Later assessments of the plein-air group are impoverished by our inability to place their artworks alongside the extraordinary but currently elusive couture culture of the Melbourne in which they were painted. The complexity of the links between the star tenants of the first and second floors of Grosvenor Chambers suggests that accepted professional constructs — which focus upon the fine arts at the expense of the materially based craft and design practices which concurrently flourished alongside the now highly celebrated art practices — distort our understanding of the parameters of creative options in the late nineteenth century. Whilst in recent years material based practices are being rapidly repositioned to be parallel with the fine arts, examining the careers of Roberts and Eeles suggests that Australian high or fine art has always been embedded within a more strongly object- and material-based marketplace and audience than suggested by the twentieth century focus on fine arts in historians' and curators' publications. Moreover, this early world of making and design in 1880s Melbourne functions in a way that is congruent to more recent textual and theoretical explications of design. Thus Grosvenor Chambers could be regarded in modern terms as a 'hub' or an 'incubator'. Deploying more recent paradigms for sense making in visual culture and its histories offers a more productive and informative point of interchange between Roberts and Eeles than the twentieth century, fine-arts-centric constructs. Despite the difference

in the reputations of Roberts and Eeles their worlds are more closely intertwined than would be at first suspected, not only via their presence in Grosvenor Chambers but also in their visual presence within the cultural ambition of 1880s Melbourne. Roberts, via the Craig Williamson department store, was far more dependent on the garment trade for his economic wellbeing than posterity may realise. Thus, in examining the points of interchange between Roberts and Eeles, we touch upon a greater longevity of interaction between craft, design and 'art' in Australia than is usually acknowledged.

Juliette Peers is a historian of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century visual culture and material history, engaged with a wide range of both high and popular art forms, including the pre-histories, back stories and precursors of new media, technologies and art forms, as well as the social histories of new technologies. She is widely published as an academic, an art and cultural historian and a freelance curator on many aspects of Australian art history, particularly the Heidelberg school and Australian women artists, as well as the Pre-Raphaelites, the history of fashion and textiles, and aspects of popular visual culture, including dolls. The role of gender, mythologies and symbolism in shaping and brokering knowledge systems and the often unacknowledged life of the past within present and incipient practices and technologies is a particular fascination. Juliette is also editorial consultant for the journal *Artlink*. She is a lecturer in SIAL (Spatial Information Architectural Laboratory) and postgraduate and research co-ordinator in Textile Design, RMIT.

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Relational style: Craft as social identity in Australian fashion

Jess Berry

Abstract: Hierarchical schemas that devalue craft in relation to art and design practices are less prevalent within fashion discourse, as exquisite hand-craftsmanship continues to be inextricably linked to high fashion. This paper contends that the reciprocity between art, design and craft that occurs in fashion can be better understood if one considers examples outside the confines of Parisian couture. In particular, this paper focuses on the context of Australian dress, where the presence of visibly crafted elements is often associated with artistic mechanisms of critique.

The paper surveys examples of historic and current practice to argue that 'craft' has become a 'style' associated with art, and that this style can be seen as 'relational' in that it creates a social space of recognition. I will use the examples of Jenny Kee and Linda Jackson from the 1970s and 1980s and contemporary label Romance Was Born to establish the presence of 'visible craft' as a style within Australian fashion. Comparing these practices, I argue that, in Australian fashion, visible craft is an aesthetic form that produces shared social identities of humour, kitsch and larrikinism.

Introduction

While in the wider cultural field, hierarchies of distinction have historically undervalued craft¹ within fashion discourse, handmade elements remain the hallmark of haute couture,² differentiating it from ready-to-wear and mass-produced products. Fashion theorist Ulrich Lehmann (2005, p. 485) suggests that disciplinary distinctions between art, craft and design arose in the nineteenth century when the schema for assessing the merits of artistic production were reconsidered in light of industrial manufacturing processes. Technical proficiency was no longer the hallmark of artistic creation, and the imperative for conceptual originality increasingly distinguished hierarchies in the arts. Lehmann argues that this is significant since, at the same time that art, design and craft diverged, the fashion industry separated haute couture and ready-to-wear. This separation posited the superiority of the haute-couture

¹ Art historian Glenn Adamson defines the demarcations that have historically undervalued 'craft', where art is positioned as an autonomous field of practice able to critique institutional and cultural bases, design is recognised as a discipline directed toward aesthetic functionality for the purposes of commercial or industrial outcomes and craft is projected as the critically deficient mastery of technical materials and processes (2007, pp. 10–15).

² The term haute couture is attributed to members of the Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture. Members must comply with the Chambre criteria, which stipulate that patterns must be exclusively created by the fashion designer or the designer's team of permanent modellers and be made at the firm's atelier in Paris. These workshops are to employ a minimum of 15 staff. The collections are to be presented twice a year. The patterns can only be made to fit the measurements of the client and must be fitted three to five times (Jacobs, 1995).

garment, because of artistic originality and uniqueness, when compared to ready-to-wear fashion, which had a commercial purpose and was mass-produced. Art historian Nancy Troy (2003, p. 191) describes this relationship, stating that, 'French couturiers attempted to negotiate these conflicting ... [yet] increasingly conflated-constructs by deploying the discourses of high art and individual style to position themselves simultaneously on both sides of the divide'.

Significantly, while twentieth-century avant-garde art focused less on craftsmanship and more on conceptual concerns, high fashion continued to emphasise handcrafted attributes. In many instances, the handmade and crafted elements of haute couture and high fashion were inextricably linked to artistic imperatives. Among the numerous examples of historical and contemporary designers whose knowledge and skills of tailoring, construction and embellishment were integral to the social, political and conceptual concerns conveyed through their designs are Elsa Schiaparelli, Christóbal Balenciaga, Alexander McQueen and Martin Margiela.³

This paper contends that the reciprocity between art, design and craft apparent in the fashion field can be better understood if considered outside the confines of Parisian couture and, rather, in the context of Australian fashion. While Paris fashion still holds considerable cultural cachet, anthropologist Simona Segre Reinach argues (2011, p. 270) 'for a country or city, expressing an immediately recognisable aesthetic has become an important corollary to communicate political and economic strength' and, as such, in an age of increasing globalisation, distinctive fashion is being employed to set nations apart. Yet, how this recognisable aesthetic has been constituted in the Australian fashion context is often contradictory.

Given the harsh Australian climate, it is unsurprising that the functionality of fashion has been of primary concern to designers. Fashion historian Jennifer Craik explains: 'Australian style is considered as anything that is practical, informal and casual' (2009, p. 409). It is intriguing then, that craft has also played a significant and prominent role within Australian fashion, for the meticulous detail and precision associated with hand-craftsmanship in fashion appears to be the antithesis to the stereotypical laidback Australian lifestyle. Yet, Craik and fellow fashion historian Margaret Maynard (2001) attest to the close connection between handicrafts, Australiana motifs and fashion that has recurred throughout Australian fashion history, culminating in the iconic designs of Jenny Kee and Linda Jackson in the 1980s and more recently by the label Romance Was Born.

3 The amalgamation of craftsmanship and conceptual concerns by modernist designers is discussed by English (2007, pp. 50–57) where she argues that Schiaparelli, the 'Italian artist who made clothes', demonstrated self-reflexivity in her use of material printed with newspaper clippings about herself, and that Balenciaga, the 'Picasso of fashion', combined exquisite cut and historic references to dress worn in the paintings of Velasquez to create garments of sculptural form. Caroline Evans (2003) also identifies the relationship between craft and art in fashion with her discussion of the traditional tailoring that underpins the political concerns represented in McQueen's collections such as *Highland Rape* (1996) and Margiela's knowledge of construction techniques in creating garments that comply with avant-garde anti-fashion and deconstructionist tendencies.

Referring to these historic origins, this paper will argue that craft has become a recognisable 'style' within contemporary Australian fashion. In analysing Kee's and Jackson's designs, I contend that the presence of 'visible craft' in Australian fashion has become associated with art through the mechanisms of self-reflexivity and critique. The term 'visible craft' is used to define an aesthetic of handcraft techniques that have an overt and emphasised appearance; for example, crochet, macramé and appliqué. This view will be reinforced through a case study of contemporary Australian label Romance Was Born. Similar to the flamboyantly crafted garments created by Kee and Jackson for their label Flamingo Park, Anna Plunkett and Luke Sales of Romance Was Born adopt handicraft techniques to evoke vernacular larrikinism in phantasmagorical dress. Through comparing the two labels, I will argue that the aesthetic of craft might be understood as 'relational' within Australian fashion discourse; as I will show, it functions specifically as a mode of social identity that is associated with playfulness and humour.

In understanding visible craft as a distinctive and recognisable social identity in Australian fashion, this paper draws on Nicolas Bourriaud's concept of 'relational aesthetics' coupled with Ina Blom's construction of the 'style site'. These conceptual tools offer a framework through which to consider the connections between craft, style and social identity. Following this, I offer an overview of visible craft in Australian fashion in order to establish the prevalence of this style and its ability to convey ideas about Australian culture and society, specifically focusing on Kee's and Jackson's designs. Finally, I will offer an analysis of the Romance Was Born label, which considers how the aesthetic of visible craft is continued in their contemporary designs.

Relational aesthetics and reconsidered craft

Nicolas Bourriaud's influential book *Relational Aesthetics* (2002) explains a particular mode of participatory art that emerged in the 1990s. The book arose from Bourriaud's curatorial practice and identifies numerous artists who are recognised for creating social situations within the gallery environment.⁴ Bourriaud suggests that through such social encounters, meaning is collectively created by viewer interaction rather than in private individual space and thus the audience is an essential component of the art. He argues that relational art is a disengagement from capitalist exchange, where 'The artist's practice and his behaviour as producer, determines the relationship that will be struck up with his work ... what he produces first and foremost, is relations between people and the world by way of aesthetic objects' (2002, p. 42).⁵ His explanation

4 Bourriaud analyses the work of numerous practitioners in relation to his thesis, including Gabriel Orozco, Rirkrit Tiravanija and Felix Gonzalez Torres, among others.

5 Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* has been considered a highly influential characterisation of 1990s art practice; however, it is not without its critics. In particular it is worth noting Stewart Martin's (2007) argument that Bourriaud's theory of relational art fails to recognise that this type of art was not disengaged from capitalist exchange but rather fetishises social relations as a commodity.

of relational art suggests a dematerialisation of the art object in favour of the activity that surrounds it. As such, relational art and aesthetics might be seen to sit within an expanded field of practice that, as Claire Bishop (2006) argues, can be associated with a variety of names, including socially engaged, participatory, interactive or collaborative art.

According to Maria Elena Buszek (2011, p. 17), current craft scholars and practitioners have adopted Bourriaud's discussion of relational aesthetics as a schema through which to interrogate the practices and purposes of craft. For example, potter Dee Taylor Graham argues that craft's functionality and its use in everyday life creates connections between people in the same way that the relational artist does, stating that 'Pots are not art. The art is in the social relationships that pots help to generate and nurture' (2009, p. 137). In applying the discourses and theories of art to reframe craft as a functional object that creates relationships within the social environment, craft engages with conceptually rigorous concerns and challenges prevailing hierarchical distinctions within the wider cultural field.

The comparison made between craft and relational art is often based in the act of physically using a craft object to create social relationships. As Paula Owen (2011, p. 86) contends, 'the act of wearing, using or participating with an art object neutralises the distance between the object and the viewer, allowing for the experience to be personal, ephemeral, associative and responsive'. Within this context, a similar argument can be made for fashion as a relational object, where the wearer's interaction with a garment provokes social response and recognition. This comparison is even more persuasive if we consider that fashion, and dress in general, have long been accounted for in the fields of anthropology and sociology as a form of social identity and interaction. As sociologist Ted Polhemus explains, appearance has always played a communicative role in society to signify group identity and create 'the shared "social body" of the community' (1998, p. 74). While 'style' in the context of fashion is often associated with personal identity — rather than a mainstream trend adopted by the majority — it can also operate as collective identity (Polhemus, 1998, p. 75). Yet another proposition is possible if we consider craft as a style within fashion discourse.

Referring specifically to Bourriaud's analysis of relational aesthetics, art historian Ina Blom identifies parallels between the 'changed status of the commodity and the artwork alike', arguing that just when emotions, communications and social relations were being recognised as commodities, 'art began to be understood as a social space rather than an object' (2007, p. 15). Blom extends Bourriaud's definition of relational art and aesthetics; instead of limiting her understanding of relational aesthetics to an 'actual gathering of people engaging in various collaborative or interactive situation' (2007, p. 15), she suggests that 'style' might be considered as a social site for an interaction based in recognition and identification.

Blom predominantly refers to style in its art-historical context, where she considers the artwork's style as a site for forming social identity. She also, however, interchangeably uses the term to refer to fashion, television, lamps and rock music, thus coalescing style with aesthetic appearance. In developing her argument, Blom draws on an essay by Andrew Benjamin that discusses Walter Benjamin's interest in the politics of fashion. She states that

The key issue here is how style is associated with the notion of appearance and how appearance in turn relates to processes of recognition and identification. The question of style then has to be thought in relation to the forms of social identity that arise from processes of recognition. (2007, p. 16)

In other words, style is reliant on the collective recognition of a particular aesthetic form, which in turn produces social identification and therefore is a 'site' of social interaction in much the same way that the relational artwork acts as a space for collective activity.

In recognising 'craft' as a 'style' within fashion it is important to understand how it symbolically functions within the fashion system. Unlike other fields of art and design that glorified what art historian Glenn Adamson describes as the 'Modernist turn towards machines and away from the hand' (2010, p. 45), in the fashion industry the handcrafted has maintained significant authority. Labour-intensive elements, such as handmade lace and embroidery, along with specialised sewing techniques, have remained a distinctive quality of haute couture and high fashion. The handcrafted in fashion signifies the hand of the artist-designer. This myth stems back to Charles Fredrick Worth's designs, which employed lavish embroidery, beading, and lace work, along with high culture and its discourses, to establish an approximation between the fashion designer and the artist in the nineteenth century. As Troy (2003) claims, Worth's success in marketing couture to bourgeois society was made possible through promotional and exhibition strategies that were closely aligned with modern art.⁶ Like the griffe (designer label), the handmade is a sign of authorship⁷ and is perceived as a symbol of authenticity and value. As historian Mary Lynn Stewart (2008) explains, labour-intensive hand-sewing techniques, and their associated costs, are the underlying features that distinguish couture from decent ready-made clothes.

While the craftsmanship of haute couture is associated with art, it is also associated with luxury, where the sumptuousness of beaded embellishment, brocade and fine embroidery indicates a wearer's wealth and social status. The aesthetic of craft in haute couture and high fashion is often associated with impeccable technique that is elegant and sophisticated. In the context of Australian fashion, exquisite and understated craftsmanship can be seen in contemporary garments designed by

6 Nancy Troy outlines a number of Worth's artistic strategies in *Couture Culture* (2003), for example, displaying fashion in a semi-annual rhythm which was comparable to the system of Salon exhibitions at the time and marking his garments with his name, thus equating the label with the artist's signature. Troy provides further compelling comparisons between the couturier and the artist in her analysis of Jacques Doucet and Paul Poiret.

7 While the handmade elements of couture and high fashion symbolically indicate the hand of the artist/designer this work is often completed by 'back-room' workers and outsourced specialists. For example, in the 1920s, Chanel outsourced embroidery work to Russian exiles in Paris (Stewart 2008), while Valentino and numerous others employ highly skilled and specialist labourers in their ateliers.

Collette Dinnigan or Akira Isogawa, among others, yet it would seem that visible craftsmanship associated with the aesthetics of amateur homemade techniques such as appliqué, crochet and cable knits have become particularly distinctive and iconic within Australian fashion discourse.

Specifically, I argue that visible craft of an exaggerated or obvious style in Australian fashion is recognised as portraying a social identity grounded in humour and playfulness. Further, this flamboyant mode of dress can be seen as a purposefully irreverent critique of high-fashion's pretensions of superior craftsmanship, and a self-reflexive method for recognising and identifying with kitsch and nostalgic aspects of Australian cultural identity. This echoes Blom's claim that style can act as a social site in the same manner as relational art. In order to firmly establish visible craft as a 'style', it is necessary to trace its presence in Australian fashion history.

The presence of visible craft in Australian fashion

The visible articulation of craft has played a significant role in Australian national culture. Craik and Maynard similarly note the prevalence of national icons and crafted surface embellishment in Australian fashion. Craik (2009, p. 435) cites the 'Australianisation of craft courses between 1890 and 1910 as a turning point when motifs of Australian flora and fauna became incorporated in decorative design', and identifies the use of Indigenous motifs in the applied arts during the 1920s as the beginnings of this style. Likewise, Maynard traces the coupling of craft and Australianism back to the nineteenth century, when 'native plants and animals were employed as motifs for the crafts' (2001, p. 164), and examines the popularity of these forms in dress of the 1920s and 1930s. Maynard specifically cites the use of 'batik work, decorative beadwork, handpainting, appliqué and stencilling' (2001, p. 164) as popular methods for embellishing women's fashion. The techniques Maynard highlights suggest a highly visible articulation of craft as opposed to what might be considered the hidden craft elements of fashion, such as seams or pattern construction.

While the coupling of craft and Indigenous motifs became of interest again in the 1950s, the reappearance of these forms during the 1970s and 1980s was particularly iconic. At this time Australian fashion broke away from conventional approaches to dress and adopted Australianism motifs, bright colours and theatrically crafted elements that were considered 'out of line with international modes' (Maynard, 2001, p. 162). In simplifying Australian landmarks and animals as symbols of national identity, designers simultaneously created garments that appealed to tourists as souvenirs and conveyed postmodern irony in the local context.⁸ Maynard highlights numerous examples that display a sense of

⁸ Kee's knitted jumper featuring a koala on the front and a map of Australia on the back was gifted to Lady Diana Spencer in 1981 by Kim Wran, daughter of the New South Wales premier Neville Wran, as an expression of national identity. It was worn by the Princess in 1982 at a polo match and made headlines around the world regarding her modern and independent way of dressing. In the local context it was known as the 'Blinky' jumper after the children's storybook character and offered as a pattern to *Australian Women's Weekly* readers to make at home (Powerhouse Collection Database).

playful irreverence associated with these overtly handcrafted national emblems; for instance, Jenny Banister's Australian Net mini-dress styled with 'appliquéd coloured leather boomerangs and a gumnut-and-shell fringe' (2001, p. 61).



Figure 1. *Blinky*, 1977. Hand-knitted wool. Jenny Kee (designer), Jan Ayres (knitter), Flamingo Park, Sydney (manufacturer).

Source: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.



Figure 2. *Wildflowers*, 1976. Cotton, silk. Linda Jackson (designer).

Source: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

Kee and Jackson were at the forefront of Australian style during this period. Individually, and collaboratively as Flamingo Park, Kee and Jackson adopted a uniquely local, kitsch aesthetic that presented Australian flora and fauna as symbolic referents for knitting, macramé and appliqué decorative garments (Figures 1 and 2). Craik (2009, p. 434) specifically notes the significance of Kee's and Jackson's designs in creating a distinctively Australian dress, stating that their 'boldly coloured, extravagant designs demonstrate a new level of Australian confidence and pride'. Their designs are considered playful and ironic and often critique the pretensions of high fashion, where kitsch in the Australian context

represents a rejection of European 'Culture' and a celebration of the ostentatious, mawkish, colloquial and quirky aspects of national identity. As curator Sally Gray argues, while Kee and Jackson both adopted motifs from multicultural reference points, in their use of typically Australian patterns they were:

Rejecting the 'cringe' and its associated insecurities, they set about restoring a sense of delight and pleasure (with some intended ironic humour) in Australian vernacular forms: indigenous flora and fauna, and popular symbols of Australian locality such as the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the Sydney Opera House and, more problematically, Aboriginal imagery. Undeterred by notions of kitsch, popular taste or high-keyed colour, they expanded the visual language of an audience tired of the received notions of what constituted good taste and haute couture. (Gray, 1999, p. 98)

While Kee's and Jackson's garments' subject matter was often derived from popular culture, their application of crafted elements was seen as a rejection of mass-production techniques, and thus classified within the realm of high fashion. When Flamingo Park was represented in *Italian Vogue*, and Kee's textile prints included in Karl Lagerfeld's first collection for Chanel in 1983, this perception was cemented. However, Kee's and Jackson's designs also reconsidered the type of craftsmanship that might be associated with high fashion. Instead of promoting ideals of elegant beading or intricate lacework normally associated with expensive high-end garments, Kee and Jackson elevated the aesthetics of amateur homemade craft techniques, such as cable knits and appliqué motifs. The application of these vernacular techniques implies a critique of the types of craftsmanship that high fashion and haute couture traditionally value, and thus craft acts in a mode of self-reflexive awareness associated with art.⁹

It is clear that Kee and Jackson were consciously aware of contextualising their work within the frame of 'high art'. They were influenced by modernist abstract painters including Sonia Delaunay, Matisse and Mondrian (English, 2010, p. 86) and collaborated with artists Bruce Goold and David McDiarmid (Jones, 2007). The status of their garments as art objects is further reinforced by exhibitions at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, and the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra, which recognised Kee's and Jackson's designs for their avant-garde artistic merit (English, 2010, p. 81). In particular, the exhibition *Australian Fashion: The Contemporary Art* (1989) curated by Jane de Teliga and exhibited at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, designated Kee's and Jackson's garments, along with the work of other 1980s Australian designers as 'art clothes'.¹⁰ De Teliga explained that she included Kee's and Jackson's garments in the exhibition because they demonstrate 'independent spirit and original concept. It is innovative

9 Adamson (2007, p. 139) makes an interesting argument regarding the perception and value of amateur craft in the context of art and the wider cultural sphere, stating that 'when craft manifests itself as an expression of amateurism, however, it becomes genuinely troublesome ... The amateur mindset implies a complete indifference to the self-critical values of the avant-garde'. He argues that where modern art has sought to define itself against art, craft has aimed to distinguish itself from amateur hobbyists. Yet, the amateur has also functioned as a form of critique within art practice; Adamson cites the work of Mike Kelly and Tracey Emin as recent examples of this.

10 Other fashion designers showcased in the exhibition included Peter Tully, Stephen Galloway and Tiwi Designs (de Teliga, 1989).

fashion at its most exciting where art, craft and design intermingle' (1989, p. 5). Many garments in the exhibition explored Australian mythology and icons and showcased handcrafted techniques (Figure 3). As de Teliga states, 'here is the new art of contemporary life realised in dress — a fresh aesthetic combining traditional crafts with innovative design concepts' (1989, p. 7). Thus, through exhibitions held locally and internationally, Australian fashion featuring visible crafted elements became associated with art. That these garments demonstrated the conceptual applications of craft through concerns of national identity further consolidated the relationship between craft and art in Australian fashion.



Figure 3. Women's ensemble, 1980. Jenny Kee (designer), Jane Ayres (knitter), Flamingo Park, Sydney (manufacturer).

Source: Powerhouse Museum, A7527.

The subject matter and craft techniques that feature in Kee's and Jackson's garments helped establish a playful and ironic visual language of Australian dress. Their use of visible craft as a recognisable style suggested a shared social identity of larrikinism and humour that has often been associated with Australian national identity. The larrikin is a colloquial character that playfully challenges social convention and authority with humour, but also historically conveys 'loudness in dress'.¹¹ While, as sociologist Duncan Bell suggests (2003, p. 73), 'there is no singular, irreducible, national narrative, no essentialist "national identity"', Bruce Tranter's and Jed Donoghue's sociological survey (2007, pp. 165–66) demonstrates that the larrikin continues to be a salient character of Australian national identity. Along with other 'heroic' figures, including Anzacs, convicts, postwar immigrants, sporting heroes and Aboriginal people, the larrikin is perceived to form the basis of an 'Australian Mythscape'.

Tranter and Donoghue (2007, p. 170) argue that 'national identity is constructed through, and reinforced by, everyday symbols'. While they cite movies, books and newspaper articles as reminders that reinforce aspects of national identity, it is not unreasonable to suggest that fashion can also convey these myths. As Craik (2007, p. 432) contends, the themes of Australiana are cyclical in fashion and often reflect debates of national identity or the popularity of national icons at particular points in time.

Kee's and Jackson's use of visible craft conveys a playful, larrikin social identity in its tongue-in-cheek exaggeration, application of kitsch popular imagery and refusal to conform to the dictates and pretensions of high fashion. It is clear that fashion plays a crucial role in the construction of social identity. Sociologist Fred Davis (1992, p. 16) states,

by social identity ... I include within the concept's purview any aspect of self about which individuals can through symbolic means communicate with others, in the instance of dress through predominantly non-discursive visual, tactile, and olfactory symbols.

From this position, it is possible to conceive that specific aspects of fashion might symbolically communicate meaning and that the visible and tactile qualities of the handcrafted are able to convey social identity. Craik's (2009, p. 432) discussion of dress that incorporated crafted Australiana and Indigenous motifs argues that by 'wearing bold distinctive designs, a person dons a striking symbol of national identity and cultural difference' and suggests that this creates a dialogue between wearer and other people. Davis's and Craik's views thus reinforce the relational nature of craft in Australian dress and allude to the idea that the crafted garment acts as a social space of cultural recognition.

As I have shown, in Kee's and Jackson's designs craft communicates the narrative of larrikinism. While this association might be conveyed through their choice of motifs, it would seem that craftsmanship of an amateur or homemade

¹¹ According to Melissa Bellanta (2009) this 'loudness in dress' was attributed to the larrikin of the 1880s who wore high-heeled boots and bell-bottom pants.

aesthetic also plays a significant role in constructing this social identity. In this context, the handcrafted is seen to represent a critique of high fashion, which it does through the use of ironic humour, and it establishes their garments as an art form. The following section considers the contemporary label Romance Was Born, arguing that its continuation of a handcrafted aesthetic confirms that craft is a recognisable style in Australia fashion. Moreover, I argue that the visible craft in the label's work also conveys larrikinism as a social identity. This reiterates Blom's argument that style can act as a social site in the same vein as relational art.

Romance Was Born: The articulation of craft in contemporary Australian fashion

Visible craft continues to feature in contemporary Australian fashion. Designers including MaterialByProduct, Birthday Suit, and Easton Pearson have, in many ways, extended the remit of craft within Australian fashion beyond flora and fauna motifs to include a wide range of historic and cultural referents. Further, the application of craft techniques in fashion continues to be associated with art practice, with recent exhibitions at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, and the Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, consolidating this perception.¹² Specifically, the label Romance Was Born has positioned its fashions within the frame of contemporary art through collaboration with artists such as Del Kathryn Barton and Kate Rhodes, and exhibitions at Kalliman Art Gallery, Sydney, and Karen Woodbury Gallery, Melbourne.

Romance Was Born designers Anna Plunkett and Luke Sales adopt visible craft in the form of macramé, appliqué, knitting and crochet. These handcrafted surface embellishments function as a visual cue that signifies originality, authenticity and aura for the fashion object. It would appear that craft is deliberately employed to suggest the artisan nature of their garments. In using pom-poms and macramé they evoke the handcrafted as the antithesis to the mass-produced in the same way that haute couture designers employ exquisite hand-stitched beading or embroidery to differentiate their garments from ready-to-wear apparel. As curator Prue Gibson explains (2010, p. 55), 'In direct response to the global super-brands which everyone and anyone can access and own, many designers are creating quirky, craft inspired works of art'. As such the use of visible craft has become a signature style for the label, and is associated with popular kitsch, irony and humour echoing Flamingo Park's previous designs. Like Kee and Jackson before them, Plunkett and Sale use craft to make a tongue-in-cheek critique of fashion's dictates, yet also to indicate artistic authenticity and value.

12 These recent exhibitions include *Together Alone Australian and New Zealand Fashion* (2010) featuring the designs of Romance Was Born and MaterialByProduct and the Easton Pearson retrospective at the Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane (2010).

The vernacular nature of the crafted elements Plunkett and Sales adopt suggests nostalgia for home sewing and a collective understanding of craft as a medium that can convey playfulness in Australian dress. This idea is specifically conveyed through their Spring/Summer 2006 collection entitled *Regional Australia* (Figure 4). In these ensembles Plunkett and Sales contravene the functional aspects of sportswear and casual attire in their exploitation of decorative embellishment. The collection primarily consists of day dresses, leggings and Dunlop Volleys (canvas tennis shoes). What makes these garments unique and unusual is the combination of contemporary artist Del Kathryn Barton's surrealist textile prints and the application of handcrafted elements in the form of crochet caps and capes. In styling the garments before a backdrop of souvenir-style Australian tea towels, *Romance Was Born* relies on the sentimental associations of the handcrafted to recall nostalgia for a mythic period of naivety within Australian culture.

Romance Was Born recognises the important role of narrative and symbolic reference to avant-garde and couture fashion, realising that these considerations supply high fashion with the status of 'high culture'. Yet, the symbolic and narrative elements they choose to embellish their garments with also draw on the characteristics of craft and kitsch, namely, what sociologist Sam Binkley (2000, p. 142) identifies as a 'dependence on clichés, well-rehearsed formulas, derivative content and use of obvious, easily triggered, aesthetic responses, most typically sentimental feeling'.

The sentimentality that Plunkett and Sales draw on is closely associated with the craft techniques they adopt, where, for example, crochet, macramé and knitting, evoke symbolic reference to the domestic concerns of a bygone era. An example of this can be seen in their Spring/Summer 2009 collection *Doilies and Pearls, Oysters and Shells* (Figures 5 and 6). Inspired by marine life, high tea and vintage fabrics, the collection included mermaid dresses with knitted seaweed fringes, shell-encrusted garments and Iced VoVo¹³ minis made of pom-poms. In this context, the hand-crafted elements are used ironically, exploited for their kitsch associations of 'bad art', decorativeness and debased low culture, yet are elevated to the form of high fashion.¹⁴ The relationship between craft and art is further accentuated by the artistic contributions of Esme Timbery and Patrick Doherty to the collection, which included Doherty's photographic images of elderly people knitted in metallic thread and shell encrusted shoes designed by Timbery.

13 A rectangular tea biscuit topped with pink icing, a centre strip of raspberry jam, and sprinkled with coconut.

14 *Romance Was Born*'s status as high fashion is evidenced by the label's presence at Australia's premier fashion event Rosemount Australian Fashion Week and representation in magazines such as *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*. An invitation to work as interns with John Galliano further attests to Plunketts' and Sales' reputation in the field (<http://www.romancewasborn.com>).



Figure 4. Romance Was Born, Regional Australia, Spring/Summer Collection 2006.

Source: Romance Was Born. <http://www.romancewasborn.com>



Figure 5. Romance Was Born, Doilies and Pearls, Oysters and Shells, Spring/Summer Collection 2009.

Source: Romance Was Born. <http://www.romancewasborn.com>



Figure 6. Romance Was Born, Doilies and Pearls, Oysters and Shells, Spring/Summer Collection 2009.

Source: Romance Was Born. <http://www.romancewasborn.com>

It would seem that Romance Was Born deliberately exaggerates the crafted elements of their garments as a form of self-reflexive critique. Male models adorned with crochet beards, or a pastel-coloured tutu worn with a knitted octopus bonnet appear more akin to costumes made by mothers and grandmothers for children to wear to dress-up parties than the garments of high fashion. For even the most outlandish haute couture appears to have a level of sophistication — achieved through the quality of fabric or the exquisite detail of hand embellishment — that is not immediately discernible in the Romance Was Born collections. Thus, the amateur aesthetic of visible craft in the hands of Plunkett and Sales critiques the pretensions of high fashion in a similar way to Kee and Jackson. While Plunkett and Sales have developed their designs

beyond the native symbols that have been consistently associated with craft in Australian fashion, they continue to associate craft with ironic kitsch and so engage with the larrikin social identity associated with Australian culture.

The larrikinism and humour associated with Romance Was Born's collections are often conveyed in how its garments are styled for magazines and advertising. In Harper's Bazaar Australian Style (2009) Romance Was Born showcases visibly crafted garments, including a jacket made of deconstructed sheepskin toys and leather fringes as well as a head-dress featuring feathers and pom-poms. These garments are worn by models partaking in parochial Australian pastimes, for example sitting in the back of a ute framed by a bare-chested surfer waxing his board, or in a heavily graffitied pub toilet drinking a pot of beer. In this way, the appearance of visible craft, especially in a form that highlights its homemade or kitsch qualities, is associated with aspects of Australian culture and identity. Plunkett and Sales explain these images:

We chose different locations around Sydney that we thought represented Australian culture, which reflects the style of our lives. To us there is nothing more quintessential than beaches babes and beers. So we chose some total hotties we love, and cruised around all day long from the botanical gardens to Maroubra and then back to our home at the Cricketers Arms pub. (We don't really live there ... well, sort of). (cited in Huckbody, 2009, p. 173)

As such, Plunkett and Sales appear to be making visual comparisons between vernacular handicrafts and stereotypical 'everyday' Australian experiences. In many ways Plunkett and Sales might be seen to exaggerate the aesthetic of the handcrafted to create a style that is distinctively Australian through its appreciation of kitsch humour. In analysing examples of Romance Was Born's collections, Blom's assertion that aesthetic forms produce social identification appears relevant. While it is not possible or even desirable to identify one single aesthetic identity for Australian fashion, it would seem that the style of craft that embellishes Romance Was Born's collections is a continuation of previous narratives of humour, kitsch, and larrikinism identified by Kee and Jackson. The familiar associations of kitsch, sentimentality and nostalgia that the amateur or homemade 'style' of craft provokes becomes a site of social recognition and shared cultural identity, a site of social interaction to consider issues of Australian culture and identity.

Conclusion

Using the framework of relational art and the 'style site', this paper has argued that the articulation of visible craft is a style within Australian fashion discourse that is associated with social identity. In particular, Blom's extension of the 'relational' to consider 'style' as a site of recognition and interaction is explored with regard to the case studies of Kee and Jackson (in particular, their label, Flamingo Park) and Romance Was Born. Each of these designers considers how

the exaggerated aesthetic of visibly handcrafted fashion, can simultaneously convey a social identity of inclusion and distinction through associations of kitsch and larrikinism.

This paper establishes that visible craft within Australian fashion is associated with 'art', because the overt handmade elements are symbolic of the artist's hand. This analogy stems from haute couture's privileging of the handmade over the mass-produced, but is also related to the amateur, homemade aesthetic employed by Kee and Jackson and Plunkett and Sales. In this way, ostentatiously crafted elements can be seen as a critique of the dictates of high fashion and an avant-garde art form for its self-reflexive methods, while simultaneously complying with the values of authenticity, uniqueness and individuality that the handmade conveys. That the overt and exaggerated use of craft in Australian fashion is 'out of line with international modes' as Maynard (2001) claims, suggests that this aesthetic use of craft is a style particularly associated with a playful and laconic Australian social identity distinct from other national forms.

In this paper, I have considered how craft symbolically conveys a larrikin identity typically associated with Australian culture. While the use of Australiana motifs coupled with a homemade craft aesthetic worked in tandem to create kitsch and humorous associations in Kee's and Jackson's designs, for Plunkett and Sales these same symbolic referents were achieved through the use of macramé, crochet and pom-poms and their associations with the vernacular and parochial elements of Australian culture. These examples of exaggerated, crafted dress open a dialogue between wearer and observer regarding national identity that suggests a shared social body of the community. This analysis substantiates Blom's argument that 'style' is a site for social interaction based on recognition of an aesthetic form.

Bush wear, swimwear and surf wear, and Australiana and Indigenous motifs, have been previously identified by Craik as 'forms of "Australianness" [which] have dominated the sense of distinctive codes of dress that have underpinned the idea of Australian style' (2009, p. 411). In tracing the trajectory of visibly crafted elements from the 1970s and 1980s garments of Kee and Jackson to the contemporary designs of Romance Was Born, I have argued that 'craft wear' might be yet another distinctive form of Australian dress that constitutes a recognisable social identity.

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Repetitive crafting: The shared aesthetic of time in Australian contemporary art

Sera Waters

Abstract: This paper analyses a strain of contemporary art that employs a method of production identified as 'repetitive crafting'. This will be explored through the practices of four contemporary Australian artists, all who use repetition to transform everyday gestures and materials into cumulative artistic manifestations. While their works speak of the physical proximities between art and body, including endurance, intimacy, and complex relationships with labour (even obsessive-compulsiveness) it is, above all, the activation of 'time' as both process and aesthetic that is taken up as most important impetus here. I will argue that 'time' within these repetitively crafted works is integrally transferred from the making to viewing processes through networked cultures, and acts to slow down or make space for understanding corporeal and personal connections with 'time' anew. I argue that by employing and exhibiting the aesthetic of 'time' in the relational sphere, such artworks become part of a larger political project to 'encourage an inter-human intercourse which is different to the "zones of communication" that are forced upon us' (Bourriaud, 1998, p. 161).

Throughout this paper I am going to 'critically describe'¹ a particular mode of production within contemporary art, a mode that aesthetically explores, applies and shares 'time'; I will call this 'repetitive crafting'. Repetitive crafting as an idea can be teased out in numerous directions, but in this paper it is located within contemporary art practice, citing work from four Australian artists; Justine Khamara, Tim Sterling, Ray Harris, and Troy-Anthony Baylis. While the output from these artists differs considerably, they are brought together here as each use repetition and time to transform the 'everyday'. Small gestures that singularly could be described as banal are given renewed valued when extended within the context of contemporary art. When accumulated, the gestures of these artists forge connections and create relational experiences; experiences that in this specific case take up and ask for 'time'.

¹ I am using this term in accordance with John Rajchman's call for a 'lightness' in theory, which is examined throughout his paper 'The Lightness of Theory' (Kocur & Leung, 2005, pp. 388-394). As well, this paper is indebted to current theories, especially those of Johanna Drucker, Nicolas Bourriaud, Nikos Papastergiadis, Claire Bishop and Jacques Rancière, that arise from within artistic practices and embrace optimistic playfulness, sharing, and proffer complexly human aspects of art making. As such, cool visions of negative criticality as well as oppositions (rational/irrational, art/craft/design, body/mind, amateur/professional, active/passive for example) are recognised as reductive, given the messy intricacies of art practice which importantly happen within lived experience. Accordingly, it is the artists, through their art and correspondence, who inform my analysis on this specific current of contemporary art.



Figure 1. Justine Khamara, *godfinger 2*, 2007, collaged colour photographs, 43 x 58 x 15 cm.

Source: John Brash, courtesy the artist.

Firstly, to clarify what is meant by ‘repetitive crafting’ Melbourne artist Justine Khamara’s *godfinger 2* (2007, Figure 1) is used as an exemplar. This is a work collaged into a sculptural form from a mass of scalpel-cut photographs. Repetitiveness as shown here is the re-enactment of a gesture over and over again; cutting one arm, another and yet another again. The monotony of this gesture, with only slight variations in image or blade angle, purposefully devours vast quantities of time. Yet, I argue, located within what could be considered a dreary tedium of repetitiveness is not merely boredom, but ‘space’ in which alternative relationships to time are forged and presented.

Paired with this idea of repetitiveness is the term ‘crafting’, a verb stemming from a re-evaluation of the term ‘craft’, contemporarily understood as ‘not a movement or a field, but rather a set of concerns that is implicated across many types of cultural production’ (Adamson, 2010, p. 3). While preceded by the historical legacies of ‘craft’ (guilds and workshops, studio craft, home-craft, hand-craft for example), as well as craft’s political entanglements (namely the challenging of gender roles, the DIY (do-it-yourself) craft movement, or an anti-technology/machine sentiment), in these post-medium, postdisciplinary² times, to adapt Ingrid Periz’s observation (2008, p. 441), the ‘historical freight

2 Though the extent is debatable, ‘postdisciplinarity’ has dissolved boundaries between the disciplines, such as art craft and design disciplines and allows it to be a given in this paper that particular skills, techniques or processes, which would have once been under the banner of ‘craft’, cannot today be so simply categorised; an idea supported by Glenn Adamson (2010, p. 586).

[of craft] is optional'.³ Whether or not one is addressing these histories, the use of the term 'craft' and the process of 'crafting' crucially still continue to infer an intimate, skilled and bodily way of making. Within this paper the discussion of artists' 'crafting' encompasses a wide scope of honed and considered gestures that challenge previous values held concerning 'skill' and result in outcomes ranging from film to sculptural objects.

'Repetitive crafting' then can be understood as a dexterous laboriousness, where the relationship between body and material is bound by long periods of concentrated time. The repetitive crafting approach equates the production of art to 'work' and extended 'effort', with making taken to the extreme, even a test of endurance. Melbourne-based artist Tim Sterling's efforts are evident in *Pallet* (2009, Figures 2 & 3), or *Electric Chair* (2010, Figures 4 & 5), each made from elaborate arrangements of marks, or stationery and fixings. Discussion of 'effort' and 'work' here are not referred to in their economic guises, but hold value in terms of the output of human energy – or even, when I move on to discuss repetitive crafting as relational – as a transference of energy, through its suspension materially within artworks. Repetitive crafting, in this light, is perhaps the marathon of the art world, requiring both physical and psychological stamina, will-power and obsession to reach the finish line (Murakami, 2008).

Like long-distance running, repetitive crafting is often a lone venture, yet its final outcome of sharing is a critical and driving component. For as Nicolas Bourriaud has written, 'artists intend their work to be seen by their contemporaries' (Bourriaud, 1998, p. 167). Troy-Anthoy Baylis' use of repetitive gestures to transform reclaimed glo-mesh in *Postcard (To Bella Vista from Cherrybrook)*, 2010 (Figure 6), is used as a gesture which not only accumulates form, but also meaning in both the making and viewing processes. He writes that while 'the finished object is more important than the making process ... I am keen for my viewers to 'see the artist's endurance – the artist's commitment to the social and political issues I am talking-back to through the work' (Baylis, 2010). Within the process of repetitive crafting, as Baylis makes clear, is a commitment of one individual's time, alone; a demonstration of the desire (or need) to make and give time in this way. Artistic energy here accumulates as an investment into concerns worth the time – 'time' being the uniting concern of this paper.

3 This adaptation comes from Ingrid Periz's original writing around artists who use embroidery, such as Jessica Rankin, Tracey Emin and Alighiero Boetti, in such a way that it 'takes its place among painting and drawing as just another medium, one whose historical freight is optional' (Periz, 2008, p. 441).



Figure 2. Tim Sterling, *pallet*, 2009, perspex etched with compass, 117 x 118 x 18 cm.

Source: Courtesy the artist.



Figure 3. Tim Sterling, *pallet* (detail), 2009, perspex etched with compass, 117 x 118 x 18 cm.

Source: Courtesy the artist.



Figure 4. Tim Sterling, *electric chair*, 2010, paperclips, cable ties, 76 x 80 x 4 cm.

Source: Courtesy the artist.

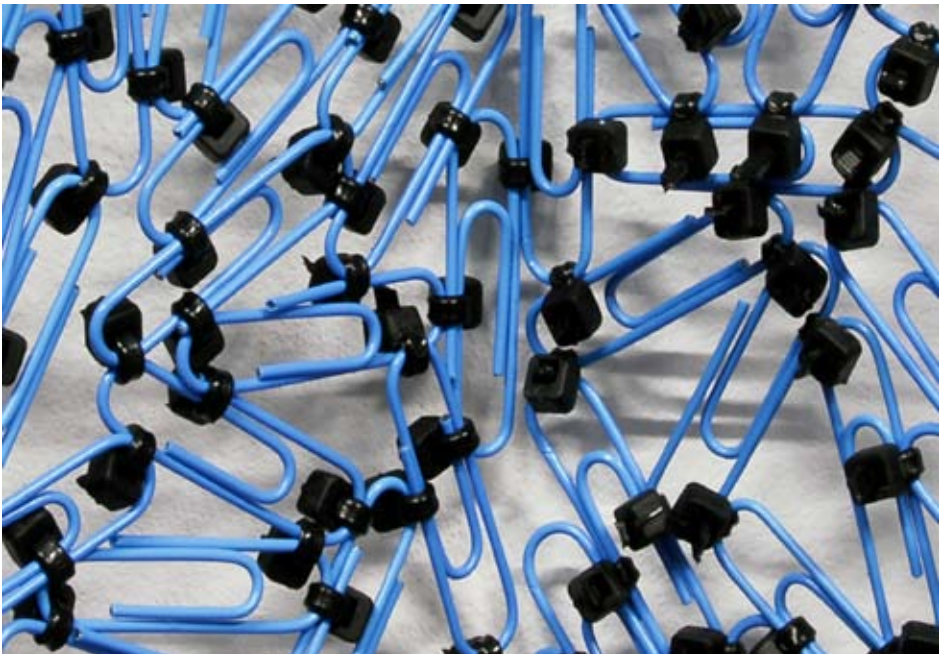


Figure 5. Tim Sterling, *electric chair* (detail), 2010, paperclips, cable ties, 76 x 80 x 4 cm.

Source: Courtesy the artist.



Figure 6. Troy-Anthony Baylis, *Postcard (To Bella Vista from Cherrybrook)*, 2010, reconstructed faux-mesh, approx 90 x 130 cm.

Source: Troy-Anthony Baylis.

While repetitiveness is integral to many forms of art making – painting or sculpting being obvious examples – repetitively crafted artworks draw attention to the accrual of time. This is their overriding aesthetic, a strand extricated from the larger umbrella term of ‘relational aesthetics’. Aesthetics, as Terry Eagleton has described, affect us through ‘nothing less than the whole of our sensate life’ (Eagleton, cited by Highmore, 2002, p. 81)⁴ and it is phenomenologically then, through our bodily knowledge and human experiences, that time is relayed. Markers of time, such as the hand-cut photographic fragments making up Khamara’s *Erysichthon’s Ball* (2010, Figures 7 & 8), are perceived immediately and in one instant through our own (extensive or limited) encounters with using a scalpel;⁵ the grip, the concentration, the hunching over to see, the pressure required, the precision, the slow movement, and the length of time for which one can sustain these taxing gestures. These are also read knowing that programs such as Adobe Photoshop, an integral tool to the early organisational stages of Khamara’s work, can capably copy, paste and collage, somewhat reducing the time and physical strain inherent in her undertakings. Laboriousness is Khamara’s choice and she says,

4 The quote continues: ‘the business of affectations and aversions, of how the world strikes the body on its sensory surfaces, of that which takes root in the gaze and the guts and all that arises from our most banal, biological insertion into the world’ (Eagleton, cited by Highmore, 2002, p. 81).

5 Justine Khamara further added ‘I was chatting with a couple of plastic surgeons about scalpel technique ... and was surprised to find that the way I approach a work is not unlike the way they might approach a patient’. (Khamara, 2010)

I ... like the fact that I have touched every piece, traced every outline of the thousands of parts that go into a work and know each anomaly that inevitably appears when one makes something by hand. (Khamara, in Britton, 2007, p. 23)



Figure 7. Justine Khamara, *Erysichthon's Ball*, 2010, 220 cm diameter.

Source: John Brash.

This engagement with 'everyday' materials and gestures links the repetitively crafted art discussed here. Each artist plays with and builds upon the unremarkable and commonplace materiality of the everyday as well as a human monotony of habits, routines, work and tasks. When amassed they not only reveal 'the power of relatively simple gestures' (Watkins, 2008, p. 62) but also make evident theorist Henri Lefebvre's observation that the 'everyday' is the site where 'repetition and creativity confront each other' (Lefebvre cited by Johnstone, 2008, p. 15). Importantly, in this way, repetitively crafted works effectively shift from critiquing culture from the outside and instead build connections from within (Papastergiadis, 2008, p. 365). The use of

small repeated acts explicated with cheap, familiar and non-obtuse materials speak of human interactions with objects in time, such as Tim Sterling's extraordinarily time-involved use of mundane office leftovers in *Image* (2010, Figures 9 & 10). Here pencils and cable ties are transformed into complex forms which are materially familiar but configured unfamiliarly. He states:

The general objective of my work is to create sites analogous to ... real life environments by using apparently depersonalised elements that also contain human connotations and connect with life experience. (Sterling, 2010)

Sterling shifts 'stuff' into expressions of human tinkering; playfully and absurdly displacing materials from their intended function. This goes some way to support Ben Highmore's observation that within contemporary art discourse 'much of aesthetics ... is concerned with the everyday only at the point of ... transcendence' (Highmore, 2002, p. 81). However, complete transcendence would be futile here, as it is our continuing recognition of pencils and ties that enables this artwork to remain fathomable and inclusive, connecting through our 'common ground of experience' (Johnstone, 2008, p. 15). Yet embroiled within this argument is the fact that repetitive crafting is reliant upon its reception as an autonomous work of art; even, as I have discussed, when it consists of small gestures with familiar materials that teeter ever so close to 'everyday' life. For in the context of 'contemporary art' such 'everyday' gestures, albeit excessive versions, are transfigured to be critically scrutinized, re-seen, and, at their most effective, offer a 'revelatory experience' (Brook, 2008, p. 273). What is revealed, I argue, are critical analyses and experimentations with 'time', particularly 'real' and complex human relationships with 'time'.

Generally speaking, time and its passing is one of life's major concerns; this line of enquiry leads ultimately to mortality. How we use our life's time, however long that time may be, is a question constantly readdressed through living. 'Time wasted', 'another time', 'out of time', 'family time', 'time-poor', are all descriptors of the way we mark our effective or ineffective management of life's time. 'Management' used in conjunction with time demonstrates the ongoing relevance that 'time is now currency: it is not passed but spent' (Verhagen, 2008), an observation made by British historian EP Thompson half a century ago. Passing the time infers a surplus of time, whereas spending it recognises the pervasive sentiment of time as being fleeting, in short supply and valuable. The recent rise and popularity of the slow movement, which put simply has arisen to address time-poverty⁶ and disconnectedness, attests to this value. It is important here, however, to disentangle repetitive crafting from the slow movement and other forms of resistance or protest that have arisen since industrialisation. Whereas French philosopher Sylviane Agacinski 'argue[s] that one effective resistance to the present order is to waste or give time, to let it pass, to use it unproductively' (cited in Verhagen, 2008), time is spent very productively and consciously within repetitive crafting, working not wasting, but also not partaking in the typical workplace exchange of time and labour for

6 Such values and ethos are portrayed through websites such as: <http://www.slowmovement.com/>

economic reward.⁷ Time working and ‘work–life balance’, clearly a more grey area than that current aphorism suggests, are the conceptual, investigative domains of repetitive crafting and importantly, the artists who make in this way consciously ‘spend’ their time in this manner.

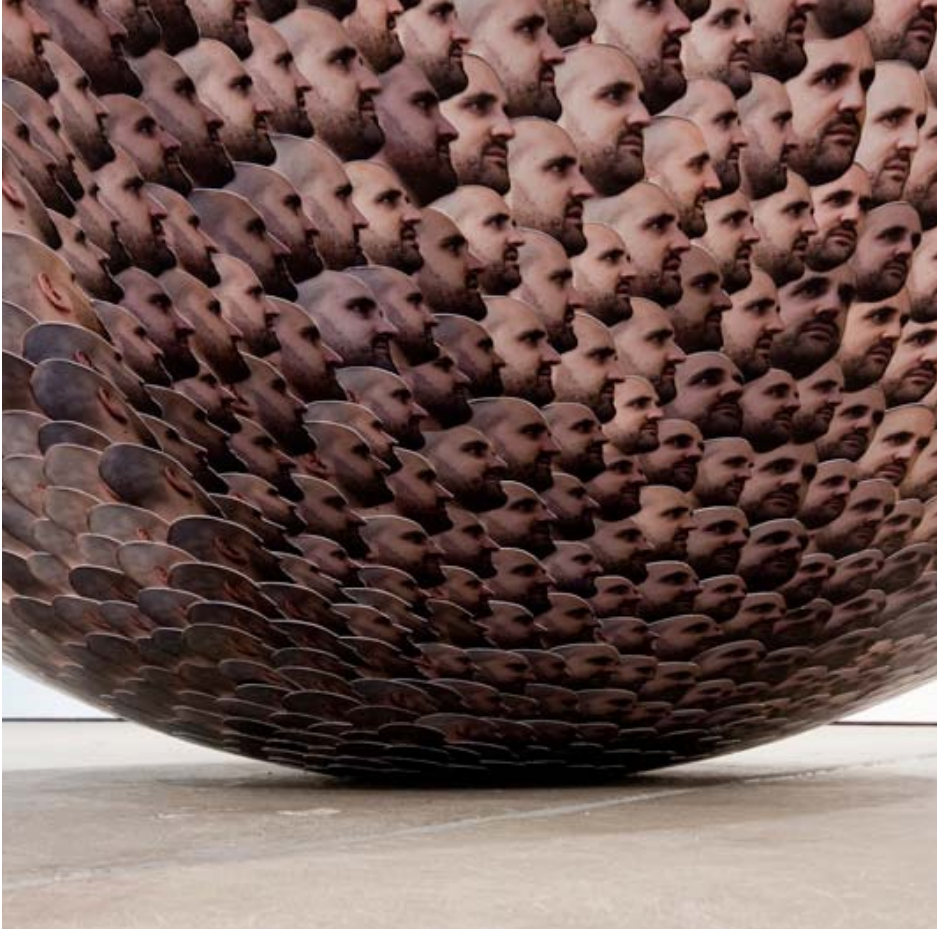


Figure 8. Justine Khamara, *Erysichthon's Ball* (left side detail), 2010, 220 cm diameter.

Source: John Brash.

⁷ It could be added here that repetitive crafting is not concerned with nostalgic anti-technology tenors and is not directly competing with or necessarily making comment on the production values of material culture. Instead repetitive crafting appears strategically made slow to humanise materials through reconfiguration and reorganisation, all the while physically and emotionally engaging with them anew.

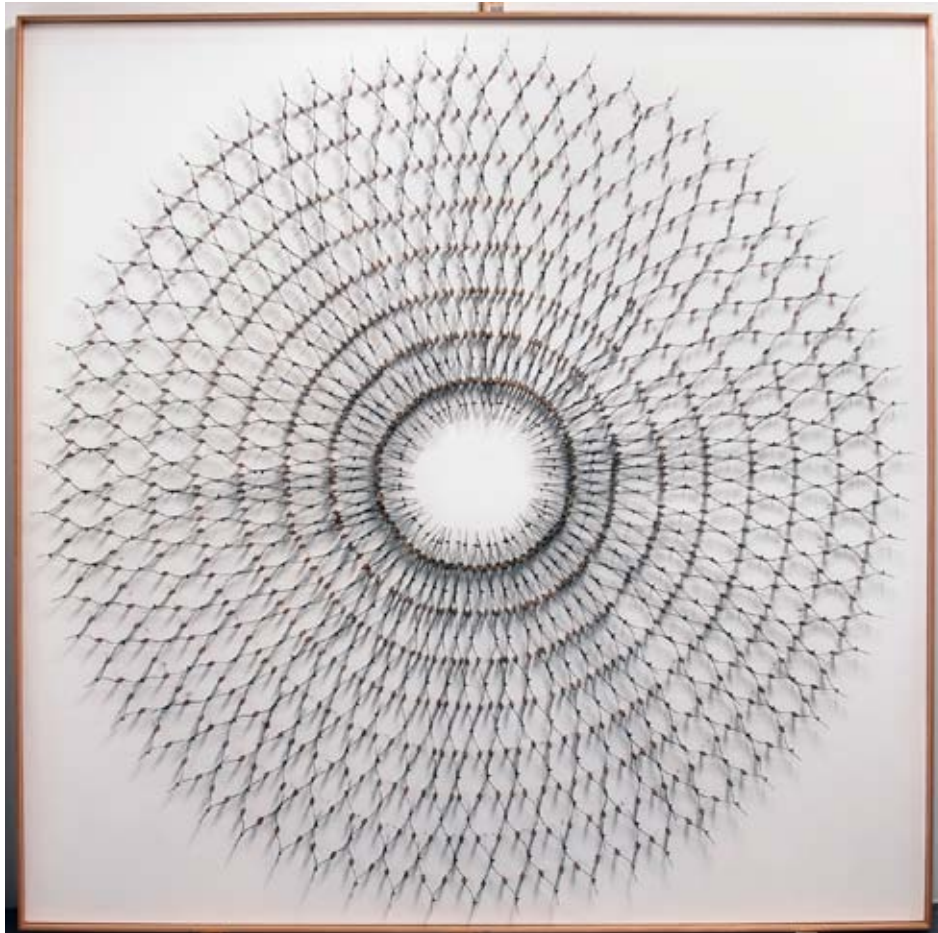


Figure 9. Tim Sterling, *image*, 2009, pencils, cable ties, 184 x 184 x 6 cm.

Source: Courtesy the artist.

Artists who make in slow ways, such as Khamara, recognise a certain risk and absurdity in their art-time investments.⁸ She has remarked:

... as I repeat the same cutting action over and over, trying to do it faster, cleaner, better ... I develop quite specialised techniques that will probably never be useful in any other context. It feels like a bit of a parody of the tendency today to over-specialise in particular fields of study or work. (Khamara, in Britton, 2007, p. 23)

8 The absurdity of repetitiveness also surrounds theories of the 'everyday' which are described by Ben Highmore as 'precisely what becomes remaindered after rationalist thought has tried to exhaust the world of meaning'; a complex lot of leftovers that as a blurry category are 'inexhaustible, unimpeachable, always open ended and always eluding forms or structures' (Highmore, 2002, p. 80, and Eagleton cited by Highmore, p. 81).

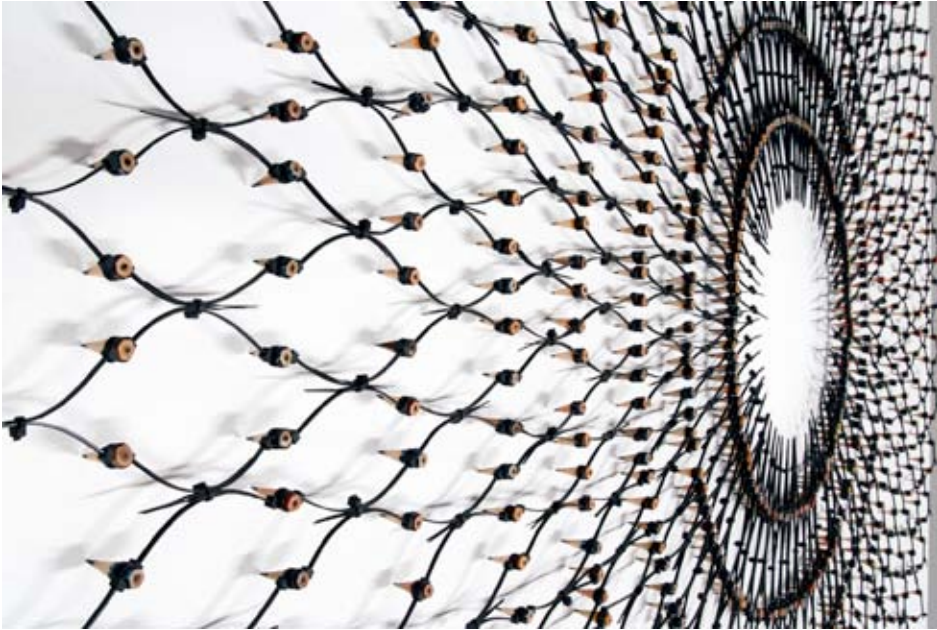


Figure 10. Tim Sterling, *image* (detail), 2009, pencils, cable ties, 184 x 184 x 6 cm.

Source: Courtesy the artist.

While recognising her particular skills have been almost honed into obscurity, she playfully points to a similar illogicality in the wider social and economic spheres. A great number of working niches or fields of knowledge are maintained by repetitiveness, and over time have become more and more specialised. In the workplace the absurdity of such specialised repetitiveness is rather invisible, having been largely normalised and rationalised. Paradoxically, repetitive and endurance-based art making – self-driven and often profitless projects – are typically positioned on the irrational side of life (certainly from an economic rationalist stance), as having affinity with madness, or as writer Stephanie Britton teased in an essay written for *Artlink*, ‘obsessive-compulsiveness’ (Britton, 2007). Certainly, in the sphere of repetitive crafting being obsessive can be a requirement; Baylis relates that deadlines ‘will force me to work extended and uninterrupted hours, days and even weeks to get the work completed in time’ (Baylis, 2010). Yet whether obsessive, irrational, stressful, or otherwise, there does remain an irreconcilable tension and inequality of values assigned to these separate work domains, both of which rely upon specialised repetitive actions.

Complicating this further, Alain de Botton, in *The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work*, describes on a larger philosophical scale the ‘average’ worker’s lament;

our exertions generally find no enduring physical correlatives. We are diluted in gigantic intangible collective projects, which leave us wondering what we did last year and, more profoundly, where we have gone and quite what we have amounted to. (2009, p. 182)

against the craftsman (or rather craftsperson) who witnesses in their makings:

a stable repository of ... skills and an accurate record of ... years, and hence feel collected together in one place, rather than strung out across projects which long ago evaporated into nothing one could hold or see. (2009, p. 182)

While these observations rely upon simplifications and generalisations, de Botton does make apparent the human desire for work to be transformed, over time, into expressive configurations about human connectivity and one's impact within their world. A sense of control is fundamental to this state, and Khamara (2010) writes:

it feels as though I do what I do as a means of putting things in order, of gaining mastery over a (very) small piece of the world, the only piece I have total control over. And for the thrill of seeing something first seen in my mind's eye made manifest.

While the logic of repetitive crafting can seem strangely absent – for how sustainable (economically, physically and time-wise) are such lengthy undertakings – these artworks suggest important alternatives to the many interactions/transactions of our time.

In contrast to efficient productivity toward a specified outcome, a predominant focus within repetitive crafting is the envelopment in the time-consuming process of making. Nicolas Bourriaud, in his postulating upon contemporary artists and relational aesthetics observed: 'they use time as a raw material ... the production of gestures is more important than the production of material things' (Bourriaud, 1998, p. 170). While this is apt in relation to repetitive crafting, given it is the time-consuming gesture that speaks foremost, it pays to be reminded again that the final material outcome, the resulting artwork to be shared via exhibition, certainly remains a desirous, vital driving force. Yet there are importantly, the artists convey, benefits to making and taking time to repetitively craft. Baylis says of his lengthy processes which include knitting, 'it allows me to dream – to wander – and to focus and concentrate and reflect on what I am doing and the meaning/s of the work' (2010). Khamara, too, appreciates that slow making buys her time to 'slow things down a little; that the time I have embedded in these objects might have its own gravitational pull that tugs one into a more contemplative space for a bit' (2010). Time repeating, then, can create other spaces for the mind to 'work' while the hands continue on into habit. Taking this space analogy further and into a physical territory, Papastergiadis has taken up the artist studio for analysis. He writes that the studio, often located in the abandoned zones of cities, offers:

'... a location for contemplation and reflection. I imagine that these spaces prompted other unconscious connections, enabled artists to think through the unthought thoughts of our time. These were breathing spaces in which attention was allowed to wander'. (Papastergiadis, 2008, p. 369)

The run-down, non-demarcated studio, then, is analogous to allocating and investing oneself into pockets of time in order to incessantly repeat, forming 'breathing space' which proffers other interactions with work, time and our world. These disruptions of the usual flow of time Bourriaud terms as 'social interstice', in that they:

... create free spaces and periods of time whose rhythms are not the same as those that organize everyday life, and they encourage an inter-human intercourse which is different to the 'zones of communication' that are forced upon us. (Bourriaud, 1998, p. 161)

The slow time, the down time, and the head space are all avenues with which to disrupt typical flows and exchanges of time.

Likewise, according to Terry Smith, a tendency within contemporary art is 'the taking up of a viewer's time before the work provides enough information about itself for its point to become apparent' (Smith, 2009, p. 194). This requesting or arresting of a viewer's time is evident in all of the works shown thus far – each requires the noticing of time spent transforming the ordinary for their effectiveness – but is particularly apt to discussion of Ray Harris's films, looped to be watched time and time again. *Slap Happy* (2009, Figure 11) and *I'm Gonna Wash that Man Right Outta my Hair* (2010, Figure 12) take time (several minutes) for the use of repetitive actions to become clear; the subject slapping her face with striking pink paint or increasingly more manically shampooing her hair. Harris suggests that 'repetitiveness in these videos is extremely important as it shows the endurance and intensity of the task which can be painful, dangerous, uncomfortable and confronting' (Harris, 2010). The act of excessive shampooing in *Gonna Wash that Man Right Outta my Hair* extends a typical cleansing routine into a creative act, transforming the repetitive gesture into one of defiance, catharsis, and offers space for readings alternative to merely shampooing. It is through this repeating of carefully executed but familiar gestures, building over time into a crescendo, that Harris's physical actions read also as states of psychological repetition. She likens this process to 'recreating ... certain situations in your life in the hopes of resolving them, and the unawareness people maintain to their repetitive behaviours (such as "oh I just don't know why I always end up with the bad boy everytime ... ")' (Harris, 2010). In her films Harris's actions are neither sped up nor slowed down but are, importantly, constructed and exhibited through real-time, the experience of time with which we are most familiar. This, alongside their intentional crafting with lo-fi technology makes Harris's films able to be related to, meaning they both ask for and give back time to contemplate such gestures and head-spaces anew.



Figure 11. Ray Harris, *Slap Happy*, 2009, film still from digital video, length 1:49 minutes.



Figure 12. Ray Harris, *I'm Gonna Wash that Man Right Outta my Hair*, 2010, film still from digital video, length 6:09 minutes.

Globalism and the condition of 'contemporaneity', or as Terry Smith describes our 'immersion in a plethora of temporalities' (Smith, 2009, p. 198), has simultaneously collapsed and complicated time beyond the human imagination. 'Time-space compression', a term coined by David Harvey in 1989 to speak to the then new modes of communication, consumption, and transport, as well as increased access to information, past, present and future, via network culture, has raised awareness of the infinite cultural and individual perceptions of 'time' (Verhagen, 2008). Troy-Anthony Baylis merges personal, physical, conceptual and historical time critically within his practice. He writes:

Time is a consideration in all my work ... The materialities of many of my objects capture a real-time through the performance of making. The process is definitely time consuming ... Time is also important to me as subject matter as I attempt to articulate personhood through new artefacts that speak to past, sometimes ancient, cultural artefacts and of my people. (Baylis, 2010)

Baylis's art, his works of reclaimed Glomesh as well as his knitted and painted works, all similarly constructed from the repetitive 'x', reside within multiple temporalities including that of his Indigeneity. The 'x' playfully transcends singular reading, being diversely posited as standing in for 'I', signifying a kiss, marking the spot, and is a mark present across Baylis's multiple media (Carsley, 2009). Significantly Baylis's work traverses time, space and place, seeking connectivity with the past from the present.

The desire for connectedness within repetitive crafting, I argue, arises from within the reevaluation of 'skill' which has grown from the DIY and all-pervasive rise of craft culture-wide. From repetitive crafting and lengthy and intimate art engagements we can postulate the development of knowledgeable and skilful understandings of material possibilities and limitations. However Glenn Adamson, a prolific writer on contemporary craft, is critical of the postdisciplinary flow of craft techniques, into art and design for example, and has written on the rise of 'sloppy craft' (Adamson, 2010, p. 586). He has made the comment that 'contemporary art spaces have ... approached the subject of postdisciplinary craft, though usually emphasising issues of labour and obsession rather than skill' (Adamson, 2010, p. 587). It must be noted here that though I, too, emphasise endurance, obsession and laboriousness, it is not due to the absence of skill. Conversely, skill, if we extricate it from traditional values, is rapidly proliferating. The so-called 'deskilling of the practice of art' (Burn, 1984, p. 11) from the 1960s has been met by artists with a proactive and inventive, often self-determined self-skilling or re-skilling. In many cases this skilling has been enabled by network cultures; from instructional YouTube videos, online and local communities, shared resources, and the DIY, (or as I prefer the DIT, do-it-together) movement. Through these networks 'skills' have proliferated and flourished, transformed and adapted, and demand to be assessed according to contemporary concerns.

I argue that terms associated with 'crafting', such as 'skill', 'process' and 'technique', as well as 'craft' itself, have been problematically, even reductively, gauged and quantified within the context of contemporary art. 'Technique', as pointed out by Richard Sennett in his recent text *The Craftsman* (2008), has often been misperceived as cold, soulless or mechanical (p. 149), yet he explains that such a process 'develops ... by a dialectic between the correct way to do something and the willingness to experiment through error' (2008, p. 160). In this way techniques, skills and crafting can be seen as organic forms of human expression, adapted through trial and error, and suited to growth and change through all varieties of networks and the relational sphere. Judgments of quality and value, which may once have arisen from exactitude or technical perfectionism (the 'correct way'), have been re-emphasised toward dissemination, which today is as highly, perhaps more highly, valued. Certainly the success of blogs such as 'Meet me at Mike's'⁹ and other networked DIY organisations is located around their encouraging, sharing and of 'giving it a go', and even their celebration of 'amateurism',¹⁰ including all 'anomalies'.

Skill too, as summarised here by Khamara, need not be materially based:

[though] I have developed a steady hand and a highly sensitive understanding of the properties of photographic paper when cut ... without a doubt non-transferable skills doomed to obsolescence should my preferred paper stock fall out of production, I have also developed a strong will, a tenacity to see seemingly impossible tasks through, which is ... a transferable skill I can apply to new media should I feel the need to. (2010)

In repetitively crafted artworks such skills as willpower, endurance, striving for the impossible and transferring the commonplace into the extreme, are shared to suggest possibilities for their renewed application and understanding elsewhere. Skill is thus no longer limited to technical proficiency, but has the possibility of being non-material, organic, transferable and relational.

'Relational' though is disputable here, as Bourriaud, the champion of 'relational aesthetics', describes it as art that functions within 'the sphere of human relationships' (Bourriaud, 1998, p. 165), activating participants and even being determined by their interactions. Repetitive crafting, with some exception, generally takes place externally to the 'relational sphere', in the private studio or home, and it is neither interactive nor asks for participation in the making process. Yet I argue that it is relational in several ways. When exhibited, the human connection is experienced through dissemination; via exhibition in galleries, media, websites, blogs, journals and across networked culture. The exhibited artworks enter into the relational sphere as unexpected encounters with ordinary materials and gestures, a variation on Bourriaud's 'day-to-day micro-utopias' (Bourriaud, 1998, p. 163), prompting open-ended and atypical conversations, and furthering possibilities. The artworks also, as evidence of

9 Pip Lincoln, <http://meetmeatmikes.blogspot.com/>

10 An idea explored in-depth by Glenn Adamson, (*thinking through craft*, 2007, pp. 139-158).

human energy used to see through these extraordinary feats, beckon response. One current response encouraged across networks and through DIY ethos is the transference and adaptation of skills, which due to their 'everyday' nature are readily communicable for uptake. And though that response may not be an immediate physical activity taking place within the gallery space, in line with Claire Bishop and Jacques Rancière's critique of Bourriaud's 'relational aesthetics', I propose that the passivity and incapacity often attributed to spectatorship is to be challenged. For, as Rancière writes 'looking is also an action ... and ... "interpreting the world" is already a means of transforming it, or reconfiguring it' (Rancière, 2007). Looking and thinking is relational, transformative and powerful. Giving equality to each side of these 'allegories of inequality' will no longer, as Bishop says,

divide audiences into active and passive, capable and incapable, but instead ... invite us all to appropriate works for ourselves and make use of these in ways that their authors might never have dreamed possible. (Bishop, 2006, p. 16)

To conclude, what is the relevance of critically considering repetitive crafting today? If we consider Bishop's observations that 'th[e] DIY, microtopian ethos is what Bourriaud perceives to be the core political significance of relational aesthetics' (2004, p. 54) and insert critically active spectatorship into the equation, it becomes evident that artists who repetitively craft suggest through their amassed small gestures ways to see our everyday interactions with time anew. Within contemporary art practice it is these 'small' performative gestures that arise from within everyday life and have connective power. Johanna Drucker who describes this power: 'art gestures slide the habits of thought into a condition of surprise to disturb the epistemological conventions' (2010, p. 591). In repetitively crafted artworks, playful and obsessive gestures, which are simultaneously investigations into contemporaneity and time, aesthetically connect maker with viewer. Typical daily interactions and expectations of time, work and everydayness are thus disrupted momentarily. Whether viewing these repetitive crafted works directly or reproduced through networked culture, it is within that contemplative space that time, as a complex tangle of human connections, is given, and rewardingly shares.

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Crafting relations: Aspects of materiality and interactivity in exhibition environments

Sandra Karina Löschke

Abstract: The past decades have seen the early avant-garde's laboratory paradigm and associated exhibition practices re-appropriated by relational art. Both art movements re-evaluate our relationship to the world and to one another and exhibition environments play an important role in the crafting of these relations.

Against this background, the paper investigates two aspects of avant-garde practice that touch upon relational aspects in exhibitions: first, the Constructivists' radical re-evaluation of materiality as relations of energies between the physical world and human beings that has been summarised under the heading of *faktura*; and, secondly, the practical and directed application of *faktura* in the design of exhibition environments with the objective of producing new relations between audience, art institution and the world.

Using Lissitzky's Hannover and Dresden demonstration rooms as case studies, the paper identifies an inventory of techniques and materials deployed for the construction of what has been considered the first relational environment. It intends to establish a platform for the discussion of trans-historical correspondences that can be detected in contemporary approaches to interactivity and materiality — particularly in art practices associated with relational aesthetics and postproduction art. Does Lissitzky's precedent anticipate, challenge, or offer expansions on current thinking?

Whose laboratory? Experiments with display conventions in relational art as a reprogramming of avant-garde practice

The metaphor of the 'laboratory' has become synonymous with a tendency in European art venues to experiment with display conventions by staging situations that encourage social exchange in the form of meetings, collective engagement and other activities. In the wider context of contemporary art practice, this concept has been understood to denote interactivity, openness, environment and participation (Bishop, 2004, p. 52; Bourriaud, 2002, p. 9). But neither the use of the term in the context of art, nor its associated practices are essentially new, and suggest trans-historic correspondences with the laboratory years of the early avant-garde, when El Lissitzky and Alexander Dorner collaborated on new exhibition environments with the objective of creating more meaningful relations between art and life, and between the art institution and its audience. During the past decades, Nicolas Bourriaud,

Maria Lind, Hans-Ulrich Obrist, and other curators who adopted the laboratory paradigm, have reactivated and enmeshed modernist concepts with current debate and practice. Whilst some have consciously re-appropriated historic material to suit their specific aims, others have done so unknowingly. When asked about the influence of people such as Lissitzky and Dörner on her recent projects, Lind, former director of the Kunstverein München, conceded that

Most of us haven't really been aware of these things and have partly re-invented the wheel again. On the one hand this is sad, on the other good not to know everything because that can inhibit you and create a lot of anxiety. However, I think we need to look more at these older projects. (O'Neill, 2011, p. 40)

Whilst Lind regards her historic ignorance as partly liberating, Obrist deliberately frames his curatorial approach as a re-evaluation of avant-garde experimentation. In an endeavour to differentiate himself from the 'white cube' display model of mainstream institutions, he proposes that 'the truly contemporary exhibition should express connective possibilities and make propositions. And, perhaps surprisingly, such an exhibition should reconnect with the laboratory years of twentieth century exhibition practice' (Bishop, 2004, p. 51). In *What do you expect from an art institution in the 21st Century?*, a publication that served as the general framework of the Palais de Tokyo, Obrist presents his vision for the future art institution as a reprogramming of Dörner's museum model:¹

THE MUSEUM AS TIME STORAGE, KRAFTWERK AND LABORATORY
(Alexander Dörner revisited) Alexander Dörner who ran the Hannover Museum in the 1920s defined the museum as a 'Kraftwerk'. He invited artists such as El Lissitzky to realize a contemporary, dynamic display of a museum on the move. (Sans & Sanchez, 2002, p. 5)²

Rather than seeking historic precedence as a validation of his practice, Obrist is 're-visiting' it from the perspective of the present. Bourriaud theorised this tendency of 're-working' under the heading of postproduction — a theory that describes artworks 'created on the basis of pre-existing works', whereby artists

1 The co-directors of the Palais de Tokyo, Jerome Sans and Nicolas Bourriaud, intended the publication as a forum for all those who 'dream of institutions that are different: venue-laboratories, places of adventure, open to all questions, contradictions, risks.' And sought answers from 'certain protagonists of contemporary art and culture' with regards to their expectations from the art institution of the 21st century (Sans & Sanchez, 2002, p. 5). It appears odd that Bourriaud, author of 'relational aesthetics' — an art theory with a focus on creating relations between people — should seek answers only from a tight circle of curators, artists and other creatives, but not the general public.

2 Obrist continues by stating that Dörner intended 'to transform the neutral white cube in order to assume a more heterogeneous space', to overcome the 'pseudo-neutral space of the nineteenth century which was still prevailing,' and to get to 'functions which accompany a museum today' (Sans & Sanchez, 2002, pp. 9–10). Obrist's interpretation of Dörner's display strategy as a reaction to the white cube display model — is of course incorrect. The 'white cube' model of display, from which Obrist as well as Bourriaud wish to differentiate themselves, was not common in the nineteenth century, when colourful displays were de rigueur. Even in the 1920s, white museum walls were an exception rather than a rule (e.g. Peter Behrens' white textile screens for the Deutsche Jahrhundertausstellung at the Nationalgalerie Berlin in 1906). The use of white walls in art institutions only established itself in the 1930s (Scholl, 1995).

and curators ‘interpret, reproduce, re-exhibit, or use works made by others or available cultural products’ (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 13); and Obrist extended this postproduction principle to the re-use of Dorner’s museum concept.

Much like Bourriaud’s and Obrist’s own theories, Dorner’s concept of the ‘living museum’ resulted from his direct engagement with the art and artists of his time and their search for environments that foster interactive experiences rather than institutional representation. The most celebrated of Dorner’s museological innovations at the Provinzialmuseum Hannover was the commissioning of Lissitzky’s second demonstration room — the Abstract Cabinet. Constructed with cutting-edge industrial materials, this room produced a series of — at times incompatible — tactile and visual effects that were gradually revealed to the viewer as they moved through the space. The use of commercially available coloured metal composites, opaque glass, and artificial light underscored a technology-enhancing curatorial philosophy that sought to overcome man’s alienation in an increasingly modernised world and prepare him for the future. In his demonstration rooms, Lissitzky deployed architectural materials to craft new interrelations between art/institution/audience that aimed beyond the context of the museum itself.

Crafting relations: Materiality and interactivity

The majority of contemporary works produced under the laboratory paradigm converge on strategies of interactivity and audience participation, but contrary to avant-garde practice, the potential role of architectural settings in the shaping of these relations has been largely neglected. Yet, architecture and its material choices form a significant part of the ‘curatorial ethos’ of such stagings, as Claire Bishop has argued in her critical examination of the Palais de Tokyo, the former Japanese Pavilion of the 1937 World Fair that was converted into a contemporary art venue in 2002, co-directed by Bourriaud and Jérôme Sans. The aesthetics of its bare, unfinished walls play a significant role in their reconceptualisation of the building from a ‘white cube’ exhibition model to an ‘experimental laboratory’ (Bishop, 2004, pp. 51–52). The unfinished character of the interior is not only a key aspect of the building’s curatorial concept but also designates the nature of the art that it was intended to accommodate: works with convivial and interactive aspects that produce social encounters which compensate for the fragmentary effects of modernity and mass media.

Bourriaud and Sans see the exhibition space as a scientific ‘venue-laboratory’ (Sans & Sanchez, 2002, p. 5) and ‘an open stage somewhere between décor, film set, and information centre’ whereby the exhibition no longer acts as a medium in itself but ‘has become a place of production like any other’ (Bourriaud, 2002,

p. 69).³ The perception of the exhibition as a decorative background also arises in the work of Liam Gillick, a frequent collaborator of Bourriaud, Sans, Obrist and Lind. Gillick uses materials and architectural elements that reference the universal modernism favoured in corporate interiors, lobbies and commercial architecture, where 'plexiglas, steel, cables, treated wood, and colored aluminium' connect 'the project of emancipation of the avant-gardes and the protocol of our alienation in a modern economy' (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 58) and prompt the viewer to reflect on a range of at times conflicting environments.⁴ Despite titles like *Discussion Island: Project Think Tank*, *Dispersed Discussion Structure*, *Prototype Conference Room* that imply interactivity and interpersonal engagement, Marcus Verhagen reads these works 'not as the settings for new encounters but as partial images that call to mind a range of other moments and environments' (Verhagen, 2009, p. 52). In this respect, comparisons to avant-garde exhibition practice are possible; like some of Gillick's works, Lissitzky's demonstration rooms call to mind the realities of other spaces of modernity. But they differ from Gillick's architectural references in so far that they do not literally represent physical fragments of other possible spaces, but evoke their sensory reality. The demonstration rooms simulate the experience of modern urban environments in an intensified form: perception in motion, flickering lights, and the visual harshness of industrial environments.

At times, Gillick declares, his work 'doesn't necessarily function best as an object for consideration alone' but simply acts as a 'backdrop or décor rather than a pure content provider' similar to the decorative screens and installations in workplace designs (Bishop, 2004, p. 60). In this respect, Gillick's work fundamentally differs from avant-garde projects, which rejected the notion of material as decoration, or as a simple reference to industrial progress; the avant-garde's central concern was the controlled deployment of commercially available materials to influence audience behaviour and perceptions, often re-appropriating techniques and products, which had already been applied in a variety of other fields ranging from advertisements to department store design in innovative ways and to a different effect.

Bourriaud theorises Gillick's appropriations of corporate architecture as postproduction works — works that manipulate materials that are no longer primary:

It is no longer a matter of elaborating form on the basis of a raw material but working with objects that are already in circulation on the cultural market, which is to say, objects already informed by other objects. Notions of originality (being at the origin of) and even of creation (making something from nothing) are slowly blurred in this new cultural landscape marked by

3 It should be noted that Bourriaud's understanding of the art institution as a 'place of production like any other' contrasts with his association of the art institution as a 'scientific laboratory'. The laboratory is a place of modernity, where through artificial intensification and scientific control, the laws of nature and everyday life are suspended — a place unlike other places of production (Felsch, 2005, p. 30).

4 In fact, Gillick has accepted invitations to design the same structures that he intimates in his work: an ornamental façade screen for the entrance of the Home Office London (2002–05), a tasteful interior for the Whitechapel Gallery Café titled 'Adjustment Filter' (2002) and 'Fitting Room' (2004) a design for the Dior Homme Shanghai store, are just three examples amongst similar commissions (Gillick and Haberer, 2002).

the twin figures of the DJ and the programmer, both of whom have the task of selecting cultural objects and inserting them into new contexts. (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 13)

Bourriaud's theory of postproduction centres on the re-contextualisation of existing objects with the aim of creating alternative scenarios for critical reflection and temporary engagement. He sidelines aspects of originality and invention; his theory concentrates on an object's compensatory capacity for the present rather than its future potential and stands in contrast to the avant-garde's radical reinvention of objects and technologies that was directly linked to progress and innovation.

Re-evaluating materiality as energetic relations : *Faktura*

As a response to the major scientific inventions of their time (X-ray, atom, electricity) that had questioned the permanence and solidity of the physical world,⁵ the Constructivists fundamentally re-evaluated their understanding of materiality: transient sensory aspects of materials and their effects on the human unconscious were considered on par with permanent physical qualities and functional and economic implications. Materials were assigned activating and transformative qualities: colours, light and surfaces were seen as pseudo-technical means of influencing human behaviour⁶ — an approach that had already been successfully explored in the art of advertising and that was now expanded to other areas of life. None of these groups has been more engaged with material experimentation and participation than the Constructivists who conceptualised their concerns for materials under the heading of *faktura*; and no single constructivist work pushed the boundaries of materiality to greater extremes than Lissitzky's exhibition design for the Abstract Cabinet in Hannover.

The Constructivists' concern for *faktura* as a principle of creative production can be seen as a notion that brought together the arts and crafts on the basic premise of a shared materiality. Industrially produced materials such as metal, glass, nickel, textiles and lacquer were systematically explored in architecture, painting, sculpture, photography and film. Through experimental practice new principles and methods were formulated and systematically applied across all fields of creative production. The main objective was to bring art into life: art had to contribute in a significant way to debates on the fundamental issues of the contemporary world. The immaterial qualities of objects were of equal importance to their material properties and were designed to stimulate

5 In the area of science, the discovery of electromagnetic waves, the electron and the atom all offered a radically changed image of matter and space, and promised insights into a superior reality that was outside immediate sensory perception (Henderson, 1998, p. 203). In the areas of physiology and psychology, Wilhelm Wundt's psycho-technical laboratory in Dresden, Ivan Pavlov's physiological laboratory in Leningrad and Freud's psychoanalytical findings provided insights into the unconscious mind (Vöhringer 2007).

6 Wilhelm Ostwald's energetism, which interpreted perception as an interaction of energies between the human organism and materials, and his colour theory were highly influential in constructivist circles and were introduced to de Stijl by Moholy-Nagy's fellow constructivist and Hungarian Vilmos Huszar. Moholy-Nagy's own use of boldly coloured light also brings to mind Ostwald's theories (Gage, 1999, p. 244).

sensations and mediate experiences intended to communicate the cultural and social values of modern society. Consequently, every object had to prove its relevance for civilisation and was designed to enter life as a creative organising force, which would prompt physiological and psychological engagement and facilitate the viewers' adaptation to modern life in post-revolutionary Russia.

In their enthusiasm for material culture and fabrication, the Constructivists set themselves apart from Malevich's suprematism, which was primarily concerned with aesthetic and formal questions. Schuldt underscores the crucial distinction between Malevich and his followers: The practical extent that Malevich assigned to his works was limited to an increased familiarity with potential artistic concepts — his architectural models were about ideas and intellectual values. But the new generation of Constructivists (including Lissitzky and Moholy-Nagy) were interested in materials, techniques and production processes that lead to the development of prototypes with a realistic potential for application (Schuldt, 1965, p. 29).

The first appearance of the phrase 'faktura' can be traced to an article entitled *Faktura* in David Burliuk's futurist manifesto *A Slap in the Face of Public Taste* (1912). Only one year later, Mikhail Larionov formulated the theoretical premises for his new style of painting in his 1913 *Manifesto of Rayonists and Futurists*:

The objects that we see in reality have no relevance for the Rayonist painting. The attention is attracted to the very essence of a painting: combination of colours, their saturation, relationships between the coloured masses, their depth and texture. The painting, in a way slides, gives the sensation of existing outside of time and space, creating the impression of what might be called 'the fourth dimension'. (Dabrowski, 1975, p. 200)

The colour and texture of the surface instigated perceptual interaction and had the capacity to mediate superior sensations that were constructed by the artist by precisely following the laws of colour when transferring paint onto the canvas.⁷ The painting becomes both medium and content, devoid of any reference to the world of objects other than through its own materiality (paint and canvas).

In the following years, more experimental approaches in painting emerged that relied less on the colours of the palette and began constructing surfaces with actual materials instead. Correspondingly, *faktura* had to be clearly distinguished from the technical device of *factice* in painting. In a text written in 1916, Nicolai Tarabukin describes the new materials and corresponding artistic principles and competencies:

The form of a work of art derives from two fundamental premises: the material or medium (colours, sounds, words) and the construction, through which the material is organised in a coherent whole, acquiring its artistic logic and its profound meaning [...] The material dictates the forms, and not the opposite. (Rowell, 1978, p. 91)

⁷ Dabrowsky points to Larionov's early interest in French Impressionism and the colour theories and optical research of Helmholtz and others (Dabrowsky, 1975, p. 205).

Material assumed the role of both medium and organisational technique: artists had to acquire a developed sense for materiality, a material logic that replaced the traditional artist's craft and skill. Tarabukin's text underscores the quasi-scientific, systematic manner with which artistic production was now pursued that relied on the artist's competence in intellectual interpretation and his capacity to synthesise aesthetic and utilitarian criteria. Benjamin Buchloh maintains that Tarabukin's 'definition of faktura remained essentially valid throughout the entire period of Laboratory constructivism to follow' (Buchloh, 1984, p. 87). Yet, despite its significance to all Constructivist work, it was by no means understood consistently, and within Constructivist circles at INKhUK (Institute of Artistic Culture, Moscow) the interrelations between material, form and function were fervently discussed. The different patterns of voices heard in these deliberations reveal at times incompatible interpretations that highlight technological, psychological or socio-economical positions.

Vesnin suggested that the material and form of an object cannot be arbitrarily changed without destroying the effective operation of the object — its psychological and physiological action on the human consciousness. In order to evoke the 'materialised energy' of objects, the symbiotic relationship between the inner content of materials and their outer properties, or faktura, had to be precisely controlled to generate a connection between the concrete material properties of objects and the spatial energy that they radiate.⁸

Along similar lines, Lissitzky reasons that 'construction represents the endeavour to create special and concrete things, objects. In contradistinction to composition, which only discusses different formal possibilities, construction confirms and accentuates' (Lissitzky-Küppers, 1977, p. 31). He brings his argument to the point by suggesting that the canvas represents the chisel of construction and the brush the instrument of composition. In other words, the new constructivist artwork was deemed to be an object like any other and its making required the precision tools and materials provided by modern science.

For the Russian constructivists 'medium' implied a specific material or surface, and this was specified by the term faktura (Rowell 1978, p. 91). Lissitzky emphasises the mediality of materials in his 1922 Berlin lecture *New Russian Art*:

Surfaces should be so prepared, chemically and physically, that they capture the true spectral ray and reflect it. Only then, through the differences in wave lengths of the light rays, do we obtain the pure impression of colour. (Railing, 1995, p. 196)

The reference to the treatment of actual materials and surfaces no longer represents abstraction in the sense of a renunciation of the real, but it is an intensification of the real that is brought about by the characteristic appearance of chemical surface treatments (etching, galvanisation, patina, amongst others) and the physical traces of manufacture (cutting or bending). In his article 'EL

⁸ Patricia Railing points out that the idea of 'energy' or 'force' was a common organising principle among all the definitions of faktura and construction (1995, p. 194).

Lissitzky', published in Cicerone in 1924, Hungarian critic Ernst Kállai assessed the sensory dimension of faktura in Lissitzky's Prouns as an overlay of the tactile onto the visual: 'The colours are sober white, grey and black. Cutting, steel-hard precision in their processing [Fakturverarbeitung] and their linear delimitation shows how vividly they are experienced' (Kállai, p. 1058). Despite levelling criticism at Lissitzky for creating formal objects without any actual purpose, Kállai's analysis of the Prouns explicitly acknowledges their experiential impact on the viewer.

The potentiality of objects: *Faktura* as analysis and invention

After praising the vivacity of the Prouns, Kállai elucidates what he believes is the dilemma of Lissitzky's call for art into life and his endeavour 'to make objects' whilst, in fact, he was 'painting complex forms that look like objects but can be clearly be recognised as fictions'. Lissitzky, Kállai cautions, should not see the 'objectivity of new art in a simply newly-dressed formalism'. If Lissitzky does not want his works to be 'thrown into one pot together with the oil paintings of the museums and the monuments of the generals', then he has to give his objects 'the concrete, real and useful significance through which it distinguishes itself from the category of aesthetic stimulants'. If the call to produce useful objects is brought to its ultimate conclusion, Kállai argues, it means producing actual articles of daily use — chairs, houses and machines (Kállai, p. 1058).

Lissitzky's understanding of 'usefulness' was different — he directed attention away from functionality and towards analysis and invention. In contradistinction to productivist artists like Rodchenko, Lissitzky disapproved of purely functional approaches that resulted in the design of 'primitive utilitarianism' and that, in his opinion, frequently had very little to do with creative effort at all (Margolin, 1997, pp. 33–34). The usefulness of the Proun paintings was to be found in their experimental approach that 'revealed the fundamental elements of three-dimensional design through a process of analysis' (Conrads, 1965, p. 10). Although the Prouns are not literally blueprints for future developments, they point beyond the framework of painting towards architecture and the real world.

'For us,' Lissitzky observes, 'the goal exemplifies something which we leave behind. The creative process generates the fact, which becomes the goal.' But he also acknowledges that experimental processes are not necessarily linear when he concedes that at times it happens, that 'one sets off to India and discovers America' (Lissitzky-Küppers, 1977, p. 32). Always in transit between discovery and obsolescence, every object can only be understood as 'preliminary' and this is also clearly expressed in Lissitzky's assessment of his Prouns as an in-between — a 'changing station from painting to architecture'

(Arp and Lissitzky, 1925, p. xi). His perception of the object as an unstable, dynamic category is based on Lissitzky's understanding of materiality as energy, and he phrases this quite succinctly in his text *Proun* (1920–21) when he says: 'The relationship of form to material is the relationship of mass to force' (Lissitzky-Küppers, 1977, pp. 28–29). The correlation between material and force, or energy, is also reflected in Lissitzky's concept of immaterial materiality that he described as a dematerialised and imaginary space that transcends physical experience, but nevertheless is real space and can be designed ('gestaltet').⁹ The idea of immaterial materiality bears witness to Lissitzky's interest in science, mathematics and four-dimensional space.¹⁰ But how have ideas about materiality informed his choice of materials, architectural concepts and detailing, and how did these activate the viewer? The demonstration rooms represent the most advanced efforts in developing the Proun principles towards architecture and a close analysis of their design should be instructive in answering these questions.

Crafting relations: The Dresden and Hannover demonstration rooms

Boris Brodsky attributes paradigmatic importance to Lissitzky's exhibition designs and maintains that 'all subsequent experiments in modern art that include the viewer in relation to an environment derive from this first attempt devised by Lissitzky in Berlin in 1923' — the Proun Room.¹¹ But Lissitzky's demonstration rooms in Dresden (1926) and Hannover (1927) represent the most developed stage of Lissitzky's use of materials whose sole objective was the activation of the viewer.

The demonstration rooms can be described as experimentation with materiality — a play with rational structures and irrational perceptions which evoke a fluid space set in motion by the viewer. Taking his clue from Eggeling's films, Lissitzky set out to construct a space that, when in a passive state, formed a solid figure in three dimensional space, but when set in motion, emerged as a new object and created new spatial articulations that would exist for the same duration as the movement itself, and therefore was an imaginary space. In *K. und Pangeometrie* (1925), he concludes his explanation of this imaginary space with the words: 'Here I have pursued the variability of spatial recognition and the corresponding constructions of art and thus have arrived at an immaterial materiality' (Conrads, 1965, p. 129).

9 In Lissitzky's writings the idea of an imaginary space and immaterial materiality are expounded in relation to film in his text *K. und Pangeometrie* from 1925 (Conrads, 1965, pp. 128–29).

10 Yve-Alain Bois's essay on reversibility and spatial disorientation in Lissitzky's work is instructive here (Bois, 1988). Also of interest is Esther Levinger's discussion of Lissitzky's interest in mathematics and, in particular, his analogy between imaginary numbers (such as the square root of 1) and imaginary space (Levinger, 1989).

11 Brodsky refers to Lissitzky's Proun Room at the 1923 Great Berlin Art Exhibition, which was his first exhibition design and developed his Proun principle further towards space and architecture (Brodsky, 1980, p. 93). In the late 1920s, Lissitzky abandoned work on Proun and turned his attention to propaganda work for the Soviet state. In this context, Bois's discussion of three distinct creative phases in Lissitzky's work is of interest. Bois outlines these as Chagallian, Suprematist and Stalinist (Bois, 1988).

Schuldt proposes that, in their correspondence to reality, the application of actual materials in the Prouns is comparable to photography. The demonstration rooms develop this reality principle further — they interrogate the boundary between the concrete materiality of architectural prototypes and the immateriality of film. In the demonstration rooms, Lissitzky is achieving the appearance of one (film) with the means of the other (architecture) (Schuldt, 1965, p. 29). The important difference is that the immersive and passive mode of perception in film is almost diametrically opposed to the activating, relational aspects of Lissitzky's exhibition designs, where the physical movement of the viewer takes on the role of the film projector and brings the room to life. And this, as Lissitzky stated in his introduction to the demonstration rooms, was the main objective of the demonstration room. But how precisely is viewer activation achieved through material and architectonic means? The following paragraphs focus on two central elements in the demonstration rooms — the tectonic illumination object and the striated walls.

Constructing with light: The Tectonic Illumination Object

The second demonstration room — the Abstract Cabinet — occupied a small corner room on the second floor of the Provinzialmuseum Hannover. It was the last room in the museum itinerary and the visitor reached it via the rooms for Expressionism — Room 43 and Room 44. Its two door openings were covered with black fabric curtains.¹² When the visitor pushed aside the curtains, he faced an illuminated object which covered the entire opposite wall. Lissitzky describes the intended effects of this installation: 'My aim was to transform the window opening into a tectonic illumination object that only admits the amount of light necessary'.¹³ This illumination object transformed the natural daylight of the windows and was divided into three discrete zones (Figure 1).

12 Curtains had been introduced in German museums as part of the museum reform movement to separate rooms that showed artworks of different periods/styles. Although Dorner used curtains throughout the Provinzialmuseum, it should be noted that for Lissitzky the curtains were an integral part of the overall design of his room. Already in 1923, Lissitzky described a curtain for a theatre stage set as representing Malevich's 'black square': 'der Vorhang=schwarzes Quadrat' in his text *Die plastische Gestaltung der elektromechanischen Schau 'Sieg über die Sonne'* (Conrads, 1965, p. 118).

13 Lissitzky, ca. 1926, 2 'Demonstrationsräume', typescript, Nachlass Alexander Dorner, Sprengel Museum, Hannover/Germany.



Figure 1. 1968 Reconstruction of the Abstract Cabinet at the Sprengel Museum Hannover/Germany, 2009.

Source: Author.

The upper part of the object had been designed as a light box made of glass covered in white muslin fabric and providing even illumination from above. Adjustable vertical fabric blinds were installed across the middle zone. These were recessed so that the light box above assumed a floating, weightless appearance. In the set of specification drawings prepared for the room, the vertical louvres are shown tilted in two opposite directions: 30 degrees to the right and to the left respectively, so that the incoming light would be directed at the two walls on either side.¹⁴ They could be adjusted to carefully control the amount of illumination necessary relative to external lighting conditions. Two illuminated glass display cases occupied the third zone below the louvres, which contained horizontally rotating cubes intended for watercolours.¹⁵ The use of fabric as a light-transmitting material is of great importance — real materials (including natural daylight) had to be transformed artistically, their faktura had

14 The original title of the drawing is 'Entwurf Schaukabinett Hannover, Fensterwand'.

15 Whilst the typescript of Lissitzky's introduction to the demonstration rooms states that the rotating cubes in the glass cases are intended for the display of watercolours, Dietrich Helms remembers that the cases contained text and images for a history of the evolutionary development of architecture (Helms and Dörner, 1963, p. 144). A content description of the Abstract Cabinet, titled 'Kunstmuseum Hannover mit Sammlung Sprengel', hand-dated 'August 1979' and held at the Sprengel Museum Archive, also describes the display cubes as containing texts from Alexander Dörner for the initial cabinet.

to be brought to life. Moholy-Nagy formulated it thus: 'Light, if rendered into art, must first be transmitted and transformed through materials — not projected directly at the viewer' (Kostelanetz, 1971, p. 160).

The vertical fabric blinds highlighted the dynamic character of light by not only providing general illumination and controlling the amount of light admitted but by also regulating its direction. 'The light,' Lissitzky said in his introduction to the demonstrations rooms, 'which is only generated through the effects of colour, shall be controlled.'¹⁶ Originally, he had planned to use electric lighting, which would vary periodically, but this plan could not be realised because electrical connections were not available at the Provinzialmuseum. The introduction of rhythmically changing light would have doubtlessly served to animate the visitors by directing their attention to various parts of the room and inviting them to engage with the space.

The tectonic illumination object is a further development of the lighting strategy deployed in the earlier Dresden demonstration room, where the full expanse of the ceiling was covered with stretched muslin, and back-lit with electric lights that provided an even illumination for the room below. In Dresden, Lissitzky had experimented with coloured light: overlaying the ceiling along one end wall with blue and the other with yellow resulted in one wall being 'coldly lit, the other warmly'.¹⁷ In his colour choices for the lights Lissitzky diverged from the Suprematist colour palette of black, white and red to attain psycho-perceptual effects. Blue-yellow was one of the opposing colour pairs of Ewald Hering's colour theory, and together the two colours were thought to produce white light — the colour of space in Suprematism.

Activating the viewer: Mediality and materiality in the iridescent wall

... to be welcomed is the eye of the architect, that shows us a series of known objects in such a way that we are prompted to reconsider these more profoundly. Architekt El Lissitzky. (Lissitzky-Küppers, 1977, p. 69)

In the manuscript of his 1926 introductory text, 2 Demonstrationsräume, Lissitzky states that the main objective for the demonstration rooms was the activation of the viewer, and this demanded the creation of the best possible optical conditions, comparable to the acoustics of a concert hall. These optical conditions were achieved through the treatment of the walls. Samuel Cauman describes these as producing 'a cool shimmer that changed with the slightest movement of the visitors head' (1958, p. 104). The walls consisted of 40 mm vertical steel bands set at right angles to the wall at 20 mm centres. The bands

16 Lissitzky, ca. 1926, 2 'Demonstrationsräume', typescript, Nachlass Alexander Dorner, Sprengel Museum, Hannover/Germany.

17 Lissitzky, ca. 1926, 2 'Demonstrationsräume', typescript, Nachlass Alexander Dorner, Sprengel Museum, Hannover/Germany.

were recessed into a 10 mm painted timber panel which formed the visual backdrop. Similar to the concept of the Dresden demonstration room, which had used timber slats, the steel bands were painted grey on the front edge, white on the left side and black on the right side. According to the position of the viewer, the walls would have three lives, appearing white, grey or black. But because in Hannover the major source of light came from the side and not from above as in Dresden, Lissitzky varied the sequence of tones in different sections of the wall, stimulating the visitor to move around. Moving towards the illuminated glass display case, he noticed the change in the coloration of the wall sections either side. The colours of the first section on wall 3 initially appeared grey, gradually darkened to black and finally emerged white, thus representing a complete inversion of the tonal scale. The colours of the second section on wall 3 followed a different pattern — after initially appearing black they gradually lightened to white and then turned grey (Figure 2). The variation in colours corresponded to a variation in depth perception of the viewer, whereby black receded from the viewer and white advanced towards them, grey occupying the middle ground. Since the sequences varied on all walls the space seemed to fluctuate creating an effect of destabilisation and disorientation.

The most significant innovation in Hannover was the introduction of ultrathin steel bands that replaced the evenly spaced 70 mm timber slats of the Dresden room.¹⁸ Lissitzky used a staggering 1288 linear metres of what was an innovative material at the time, Nirosta steel. A chromium nickel alloy, Nirosta was not strong enough as a structural material, and its manufacturer, Krupp Stahl, had used it as an architectural cladding panel for both interior and exterior applications.¹⁹ By turning the steel sheet on its edge, Lissitzky inverted its role as a wall panel and turned it into an element that destroyed any illusion of surface. In the Abstract Cabinet, Nirosta no longer functioned as a real utilitarian construction material but as a tactile and optical animation device.

18 The Dresden demonstration room has frequently been omitted from historical accounts of Lissitzky's work, as Nikolaus Pevsner pointed out in his letter to the editor of *Art Journal* (Pevsner, 1971, p. 128). The former director of the Provinzialmuseum in Hannover, Dörner, does not mention the Dresden precedent and incorrectly pre-dates the Hannover room to 1925, which implies that it would have been built prior to the Dresden room which was constructed in 1926 (Dörner, 1958).

19 Maria Gough provides a detailed discussion of Nirosta steel and its uses (Gough, 2003, p. 101).

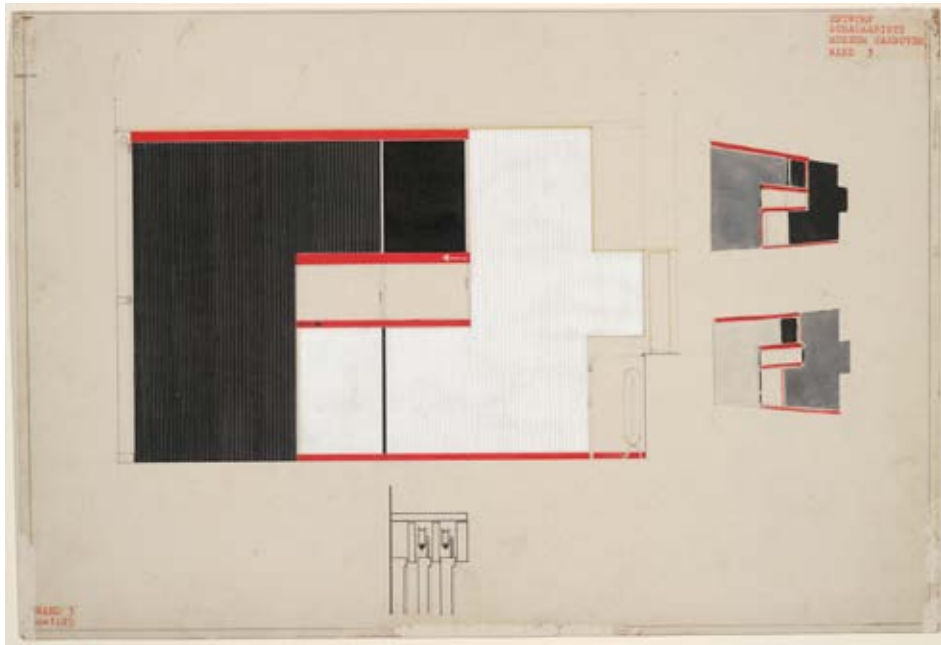


Figure 2. El Lissitzky, *Entwurf Schaukabinett Museum Hannover — Wand 3* (Design for Exhibition Room in the Hanover Museum), 1926, graphite, gouache, metallic paint, black and red ink and typewritten labels, 24.9 x 36.5 cm. Harvard Art Museums/ Busch-Reisinger.

Source: Imaging Department. President and Fellows of Harvard College.

Critics have expressed their perplexity at the fact that Lissitzky decided to paint the steel bands, arguing that ‘in themselves, along with the clefts of shadow cast by them, they would have produced a comparable effect of spatial destabilisation’ (Gough, 2003, p. 123). Yet the use of colours intensified the light and shadow effect of the wall and, with only one light source available in Hannover, the desired variation in the sequence of colours could not have been achieved with light and shadow alone. Lissitzky’s interest seems to have been less in the surface qualities of the steel than in its thinness. The use of an industrially manufactured material as opposed to traditional timber produced a much higher degree of precision. The Nirosta was only 0.8 mm thick, and effectively reduced the front edge of the steel band to the optical thinness of a two-dimensional line and thus dissolved the surface of the wall. In an annotated detail sketch for the steel bands, Lissitzky denotes their size as 40 mm x 1 mm, but adds in brackets ‘or 0,8’ indicating his desire to reduce the already minimal width of the steel even further.²⁰

In a frontal view, the striation of the bands is most obvious and the thin blade-like quality of the steel articulates the hardness and the sharpness of the material. The ultrathin edge and the narrow spacing of the bands dissolves the wall surface into an electric flickering — much like the flicker of Eggeling’s early

²⁰ Lissitzky, undated, ‘Skizze Eisenbänder’, Nachlass Alexander Dörner, Sprengel Museum, Hannover/Germany.

avant-garde films, or the flicker of the visual stimuli of neon lights that could be witnessed in the modern city. In contrast, a completely oblique view allows the colours to coalesce as a deep black or luminous white colour field, making the room appear infinitely deep in the first instance and intimate and softly glowing in the second. The visual harshness of the flicker on one hand, and the soft luminous colour field on the other hand, might have lead Conrad Buchwald to describe the wall as reminiscent of an 'operating theatre' and a 'padded cell' at the same time, hinting at the optical and tactile effects which — pleasurably and painfully — made the viewer aware of the act of seeing. Emphasising its playful character Buchwald describes the whole room as 'an object of dalliance' in his exhibition review that appeared in *Schlesische Zeitung* of 19 June 1926 (Hemken, 1990, p. 47). Despite this perceived playfulness, it is possible to discern design principles that might have been informed by scientific insights in optical science and gestalt theory. Although Lissitzky never explicitly references scientific sources, well-known optical phenomena such as the ambiguity of figure/ground relationships, chromatic augmentation and assimilation can be readily identified in the walls: from an increasingly oblique view, the grey front edge of the steel band begins to appear lighter against the black side of the band (Figures 3a, 3b, 3c). When the visitor looks in the other direction, this effect is reversed and the grey edge appears darker against the white side, because the eye augments the difference between the edge colour and the side colour. Thus the different colour sequences and view angles create subtly varied optical sub-effects. This impression of 'flickering energy' in the Abstract Cabinet is fundamentally different to the timber slats used in the Dresden room, where the front face of the timber and the visible wall face of the background were of equal width and were perceived as alternating coloured surfaces, which could be equally seen as background or foreground. In this respect the use of *faktura* in the Dresden room retains a certain painterly effect compared to the harsh, electronic flicker of the cabinet.

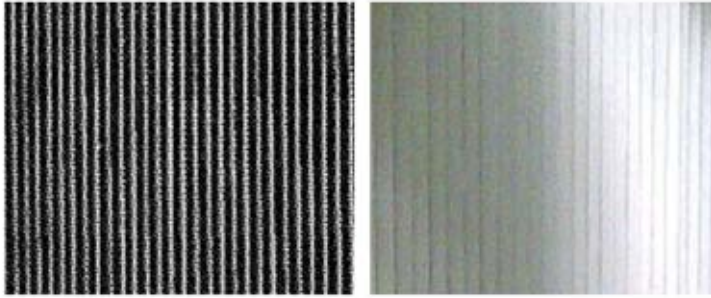


Figure 3a. Photographic details of the 1968 reconstruction of the Abstract Cabinet at the Sprengel Museum Hannover showing the changing appearance of the steel wall: visual harshness (left) and soft luminosity (right), 2009.

Source: Author.



Figure 3b. Optical effects—colour augmentation, 2009. The grey edge appears darker on a grey background (left). The grey edge appears lighter on a black background. The eye augments the difference between the edge and what appears to be its background.

Source: Author.



Figure 3c. Optical effects—figure/background, 2009. Both the black and the grey stripes can be interpreted as figure. The figure/ground relationship is ambiguous because the stripes are equal width (left). The narrower stripes are figure. The determining factor for the figure/ground relationship is not colour but relative size.

Source: Author.

Conclusion

Lissitzky's exhibition designs elevated materiality from a mere background function to the actual thematic focus of the exhibition. The faktura of the room (energy emanating from colours, light and surfaces) stimulated the visitor's movement and gave rise to intense and at times conflicting sensory experiences that were intended to engage the visitor intellectually by making him reflect about the modern world, where tactile and visual senses were no longer opposed. Lissitzky thus translated the sensory experiences of the industrialised and media-dominated urbanity into an architectural prototype, not with the intent of creating chaos, but to acquaint the viewer with these new conditions and the requirements they posed for an even more intensely technicised future.

Projects associated with relational aesthetics and postproduction art such as Gillick's Övnigskörning (Driving practice, 2004) (Gillick and Haberer, 2002, pp. 33–34) are comparable to Lissitzky's in terms of material palette, processural aspects and the objective of producing new relations, and this paper intends to offer the basis for a more informed discussion of how Lissitzky's precedent anticipates, challenges, or offers expansions on examples of contemporary practice.

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Glossary of terms and abbreviations

INKhUK Institute of Artistic Culture, Moscow

PROUN Project for the affirmation of the new (*Proekt utverzhdenia novogo*)

All translations from German are my own.

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The relational origins of inter-media art in painting, interior design and picture framing: Pamela Gaunt's *Errant Abstractions*

Richard Read

Abstract: This paper examines the conscious anachronism of traditional floral designs from Britain, Italy, India and Central Asia incorporated as basic modules in Pamela Gaunt's installation *Errant abstractions* (2008). Starting with a phenomenological response to several kinds of fantasy that viewers might experience from interaction with the work, the essay goes on to establish a broad historical framework for the confluence of painting, interior design and frame-making in contemporary multimedia art and craft. This takes account of the developments that led to the inauguration of comfort and interior decoration as prerequisites of ordinary Western domestic life. In considering the varieties of social harmony that embellishment of privileged places afforded to owners, the essay takes two other factors into account. One is the role of art and decoration in increasing the immediacy of nature within buildings or abstracting it to a civilising distance from the world outside. The other is the role of anachronism (in Walter Benjamin's sense) that modern hybrid works exploit when they re-enact the creative conflicts between painters, interior decorators and picture framers that once informed their necessary collaborations and now condition our variegated responses to the environments they created.

Pamela Gaunt's show *Errant Abstractions* (Galerie Düsseldorf, Perth, 2008) consciously situated itself on the cusp of innovative High Art and decorative anachronism to foreground the intervention of contemporary industrial processes upon traditional craft and decorative practices. As such it provided a test case for exploring the surprisingly longstanding heritage of *paragone* debates (quests for supremacy between Renaissance artists of different media) between artists, interior decorators and frame-makers that forms the forgotten ground of many contemporary experiments in cross media. The conflicting agendas of these practices betray an unconscious survival that it might be worthwhile for practitioners to rediscover an awareness of. I begin by taking a phenomenological approach that reconstructs my first experience of visiting the show and the many contending fantasies of interpretation that occurred to me and certain other visitors I spoke to. This then drives disquisitions upon antecedents of the tensions in Gaunt's work amongst three professions that over many centuries often found themselves in collaborative rivalry for the upper hand in embellishing the same spaces. These are the designers and makers of paintings, interior decorations and, as the mediating term between them, picture frames. The essay is an attempt to introduce historical imagination into

current debates about the future relationship of art, craft and design. We shall also see that, in terms of the corrective that Clare Bishop proposed to Nicholas Bourriaud's conception of relational aesthetics (Bishop, 2004), conflict played as great a part as harmony in the long histories of interaction between these professions. This, too, is tacitly embedded in the hybridity of contemporary multimedia installations.

The exhibition

It took the artist herself to tell me. The last thing I would have noticed myself (though it's there in the hand-out) is that 12 ornamental patterns of European, Asian and Middle Eastern origin form the basic units of Pamela Gaunt's four-sectioned show, comprising, firstly, the black and white *Dingbat Series* of inkjet prints near the door (Figure 1); secondly, the *Partners in Crime Series* of laser-cut stainless steel and mirror acrylic at the far end (Figure 2) and the coloured sections in the middle of the gallery comprising, thirdly, *Errant Florid Drawings* in industrially routed MDF (Figure 3) and, fourthly, the suspended garden of *Errant Abstractions*, also in MDF, through which one walks in the centre of the gallery (Figure 4). The central, coloured sections three and four seem parts of the same section because the *Florid Drawings* appear to have slipped off the wall and morphed into the mobile *Abstractions* gently spinning and casting multiple shadows from the ceiling lights onto the floor.



Figure 1. Pamela Gaunt, from the *Dingbat Series*, 2008, photographed collaged drawings inkjet printed on archival rag paper, RHS mounted on laser cut aluminium, dimensions variable: large: 120 x 90 mm; small 50 x 40 mm.

Source: Tony Nathan.

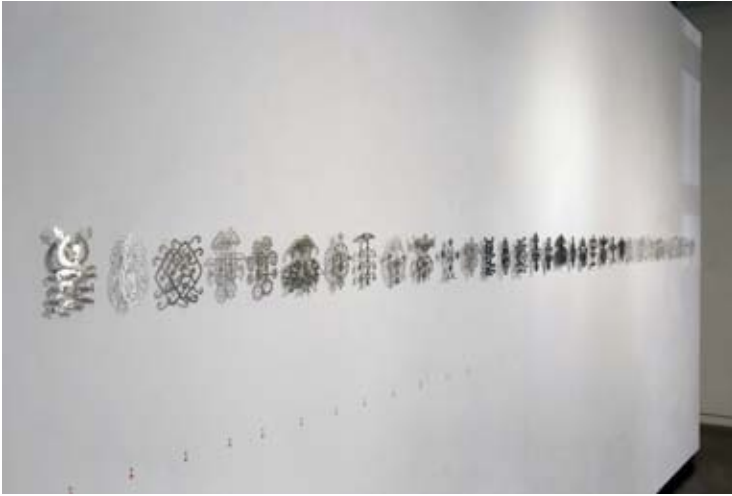


Figure 2. Pamela Gaunt, *Partners in Crime*, 2008, laser-cut stainless steel and mirror acrylic, dimensions variable: set of 12: 1.5 m x 150 mm; individual: approx 150 x 100 mm.

Source: Douglas Sheerer.



Figure 3. Pamela Gaunt, *Errant Abstractions* exhibition, 2008, stencilled and painted, industrially routed MDF, glue, etch primer and automotive paint, dimensions variable.

Source: Tony Nathan.



Figure 4. Pamela Gaunt, *Errant Florid Drawings*, 2008, stencilled and painted industrially routed MDF, glue, etch primer and automotive paint, approx 2 x 1.5 m.

Source: Tony Nathan.

Here are some divergent first impressions of the show, the two first being mine. Perhaps it was jet lag that made me think that walking beside the clusters of *Errant Florid Drawings* suspended from the ceiling was like flying one's own fuselage through clouds. Instead of shoe marks, then, the rubber scuff marks at all angles on the floor became the residue of countless crazy runway landings.

Stop there. If they were clouds they would all have been at the same altitude, or at least in different horizontal bands, but these mobiles were in wave formation. So now I was Howard Holt, so to speak, tramping back from the deep bedecked in seaweed, and these floating stencils of slowly twirling MDF were flotsam and jetsam, no, teeming octopuses or shards of fractured coral, rising and falling with the waves, while the *Florid Drawings* on the walls beside them became sea horses tilting backwards and forwards. But no, the organising fantasy morphs again, and the pieces from both sections are all floral and not far off from Monet's water lilies in colour and distribution, except that the lake at Giverny has been sent into convulsions, with its water lilies in three, not two, dimensions as they lurch up and down in the centre of the gallery. (It transpired in discussion with the artist that the debt was actually to Matisse's cutouts from the *Paradise and Bird* and *Swimming Pool* series.)

Alerted to the 12 ornamental patterns that form the modular basis of the show, another viewer, an architect, flashed upon quite different associations that drew upon his unique professional experience (though I saw what he meant). He wondered why the clusters didn't climb nearer to the ceiling, as buildings would do, while the *Errant Florid Drawings* reminded him of conurbation strips alongside the Los Angeles Highway that are generated out of basic modules by computer programs. When he said that, I saw them that way too, or rather they stopped being sea horses and reminded me instead of saxophones and eventually of those reticulated fold-up bicycles urban commuters take on trains. I had been tipped over to the technological end of the spectrum of these industrially fashioned floral patterns.

To the artist herself they were discarded bouquets, which I should have gathered from the *Errant Abstractions* subtitle: '... an exhibition about frippery, bibelot and aesthetic fluff.' Perhaps I should also have gathered it from one of the *Dingbat Series* that suddenly seemed quite angry (Figure 5). A chaste floral emblem suddenly resolved itself into the pattern of an inflatable doll, arms and legs stiffly akimbo, mouth and sex agape, as the computer symbols that composed its outlines roared across it in an orgy of masculine technology: money, houses, motorbikes, trucks. But this is no victim feminism because the gender suddenly switches. If close attention blows up the dingbat components to a scale at which they produce frisky counter-readings to the larger patterns — so that the trees compete with the woods — the staidly traditional floral patterns they compose suddenly exude polymorphous sexual passion in keynotes that define the hot end of an emotional spectrum across the show that extends to coolness at the other end.

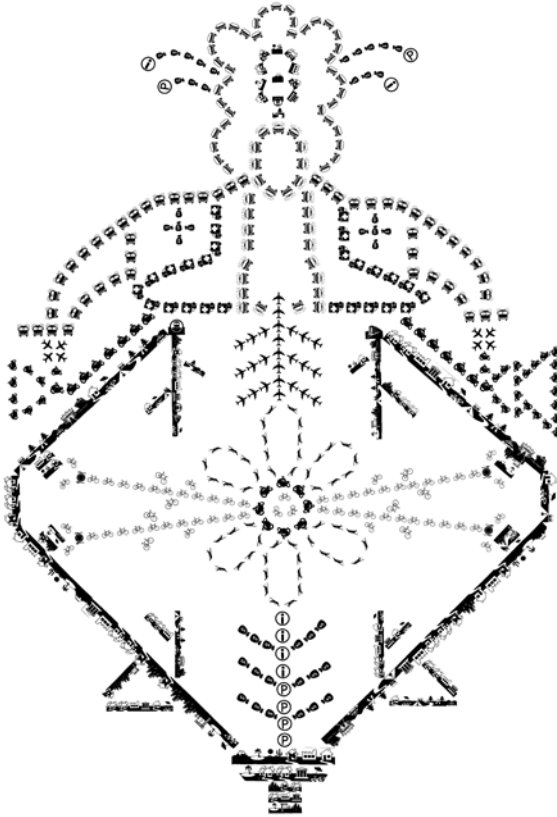


Figure 5. Pamela Gaunt, *Dingbat Drawing* (detail), 2008, photographed collaged drawing using Wingdings/Webdings/Dingbats on Canson paper, 120 x 90 mm.

Source: Tony Nathan.

These, then, have been four radically incompatible responses to the show. Are we therefore contemplating a failure of communication, in which the intentions of the artist and the viewers' responses pass like ships in the night — except in so far as we all 'read from the same page' of the more enduring catalogue essay? Not necessarily. Without ascribing to Gombrich's theory of the 'essential copy', the 'feel' of seriously trying to interpret a work of art by applying a series of hypotheses has about it much of Gombrich's manner of discarding one schema after another until the 'fit' gets closer. Poussin wrote that

you should know that there are two kinds of looking at objects. One is simply seeing them and the other is considering them attentively. Simply to see is nothing but naturally receiving in the eye the form and resemblance of the thing seen. But to see an object in considering it, is beyond the simple and natural perception of the form of the eye, one looks with a particular determination to ascertain the means of best knowing this same object. Thus one could say that the simple aspect is a natural operation, and that which I call the 'Prospect' is an office of reason. (Poussin, cited in Georgel and Lecocq, 1987, p. 134)

But it is still from one's own deeply subjective, usually recent, experience that one intuits one's way into a work of art, discarding one interpretative schema after another until the 'fit' seems more shareably probable.

Arguably a 'good' work of art channels diverse experience into a structure that alters without coercing our understanding, and sets off trains of thought that acquire a structure of their own. To me it seems Gaunt's work is a clear but capacious apparatus for free thinking about the relationship between painting, interior decoration and framing as terminals for several abiding clusters of meaning, but since the forms that Gaunt uses enshrine the pre-histories of these activities, it is more than arbitrary and private for me to do so. At a meta-level these works alert us to the possibility that painting and decoration have often tended to make different sorts of claims on those who enter their presence, and have sought to influence viewers in different, often contrary ways, particularly as we move from the outside world into a housed collection.

In a spare and cogent essay, Marco Marcon explored the philosophical implications of Gaunt's work by capitalising upon the physical substratum of 'ornament' in Derrida's conceptual metaphor of the 'parergon'.

Derrida sees Kant's treatment of the parergon — or, which is the same thing ... of the ornament — as an attempt to address a fundamental philosophical problem: the distinction between the 'inside' and the 'outside' ... between the 'proper' work of art and the surrounding environment ...

At a theoretical level, the physical marginality of the parergon/ornament is a reflection of its ambiguous or 'undecidable' (to use a term dear to Derrida) positioning on the border which delimits what is inside of the true and proper realm of the pure judgement of taste from what lies outside it.

Ornament is debased in so far as it is identified with sensuous matter on the boundary with intellectual form.

But a deconstructive analysis could in fact show that the supposedly debased supplement is required because the centres lack something. And in the case of Kantian aesthetics this 'something' that the supplementary ornament reveals is the lack of the body in the aesthetic of the beautiful. The lack, which is created by the expulsion of the supplement, perpetually haunts the stability of traditional, or non-deconstructive, philosophical theories and provides the main entryway for those who want to carry-out [sic] a deconstructive reading of their legacy.

At the end of his essay, Marcon advocates Gaunt's work for subverting 'the bombastic posturing of those modernist "heroes" who are always a little too eager to occupy and conquer the visual field with their boisterous works' (Marcon, 1996, pp. 40–41). Presumably he means the modernist colossi of the 'higher' arts, architecture, sculpture and painting. The architect Adolph Loos is the usual culprit here, though his colourful denunciations of ornament as crime are really based on economic rather than aesthetic or philosophical grounds and are belied by his own practice, for in substituting lavish decorative materials

for applied ornament behind his austere reticent façades, he is objecting not to ornament *per se* but only to the cluttered and applied kind arising from nineteenth-century *horror vacui* (Brett, 2005, p. 196; Trilling, 2003, pp. 131–33), the kind that Edith Wharton in *The Decoration of Houses* (1898) had denounced some time before in favour of the simple, classical design principles that Loos took in a new direction.

I admire Marcon's essay, but the disadvantage of a purely theoretical approach to Gaunt's work seems twofold. Paradoxically, it subverts the subversive qualities claimed for that work by making them conform to a dominant, albeit subversive, critical paradigm. The work becomes an excuse for retracing the prestigious intellectual manoeuvre. Secondly, and paradoxically, it tends to strip the myriad forms of decoration of their historically specific and often contending social functions and so reduce them to the unnuanced, catch-all, timeless concept of 'Decoration' (with a capital P for Parergon). We miss how decorations change and remould the *social* bodies that supplementary ornament is shown to lack. This misses the radical hybridity of Gaunt's work. In pressing in what follows on those 12 basic ornamental units from which the exotic mutations of the show branch out (like woods from trees), I want to pass like Alice through the looking glass into some half-forgotten conflicts between the various Fine Arts and interior decoration. The procedure may seem quaint, for what has the old stuff got to do with contemporary art? The answer is that anachronism — those 12 basic patterns and the dingbats out of which many are composed — is another intrinsic theme of the exhibition. The show's anachronisms monadically reveal themselves at different distances and stylistic levels of the forms, and so reveal what another modernist colossus, Walter Benjamin, called in 1929 'the revolutionary energies which appear in the "outmoded", that is: the obsolete, neglected and slightly dilapidated remains of a just-out-of-date material culture' (cited in Auerbach, 2007, n.p.). I regard the mild anachronism as bait for catching the relevance of fiercer anachronisms of older material cultures so utterly forgotten that they strike out at us with the Return of the Repressed and the Shock of the Old.

But first to confrontations between media. Because they are composed of flat, detachable units, sometimes on paper, Gaunt's installation pieces break a cardinal rule of relief ornament that James Ward stipulated in his once canonical *The Principles of Ornament* (1892, p. 61): 'no carved decoration should be fastened on to a ceiling or panel, but should be worked out of the material itself ...'. Gaunt's conceptual purchase on meta-meaning arises from this infringement. Her pieces are strictly hybrid, for if they do not count as decoration, no more so do they as paintings or wall hangings, for they resolutely move into the centre of the gallery where, defying gravity, they escape the category of sculpture on pedestals too. In doing so they fight the famous condition of the White Cube art gallery as 'a ritual place of meeting' that 'censors out the world of social variation, promoting a sense of the sole reality of its own point of view and, consequently, its endurance or eternal rightness' (O'Doherty, 1986, p. 9), though in another sense the 'frippery' harks back to a feminine aristocratic sensibility

undercut by mass-produced retro keepsakes and clothing logos, so that to hybridity of materials is added hybridity of manufacturing processes, including highly industrialised ones involving laser cuts, mirror acrylic and MDF. Most of all these installation pieces undermine the static viewing conditions of galleries in which each exhibit is addressed as a discrete world unto itself. This is a modern if not modernist assumption that we easily project onto the viewing conditions of the remoter past, as Theodor Hetzer did in 1912 when contemplating the sequence of Giotto's frescos at Padua as if he were observing single works in a modern art gallery:

Every picture, both in its format and its spirituality, is entirely self-contained. In the Arena chapel we walk from picture to picture, but there is nothing hurrying in our pace, nothing connecting or deviating in our gaze. We must arrest ourselves in front of each picture and turn toward it; while we look at the one, we do not deviate to its neighbours. (Cited in Puttfarken, 2000, p. 10)

So high have the expectations of dense metaphorical meaning in autonomous gallery pictures become, that we forget that their most obvious attraction would once have been their powers of illusion (Elkins, 1999, p. 39). We also forget that museums destroy the original contexts of the works they contain and force visitors to appreciate aesthetic and technical qualities instead of what would originally have been valued as pure subject matter (Lacambre, 2003, p. 68). In recalling my opening anecdotes about works of art changing the experience we bring to them from outside the gallery, let us consider the inside-outside binary not from the Derridean perspective of the form/content dyad that preoccupied Gaunt's commentator, but as it applies to the different kinds of claims that paintings and interior designs have made on spectators coming into privileged places of display from outside. As promised I will consider these claims as they apply to paintings, interior decorations and frames whose histories I will interlace with further responses to Gaunt's works. I make no apology for illustrating my argument with quotations of some length that convey the flavour of primary sources or of scholars whose originality as writers and thinkers is rarely encountered in discussions of contemporary art.

Paintings

G.M. Sargeaunt (1936, pp. 208–09) was the first to notice that descriptions of paintings by the English Romantic art critic William Hazlitt in *Sketches of the Principal Picture Galleries of England* (1824) are preceded by equally vivid descriptions of the approach through natural surroundings to each gallery. The approach to Hampton Court, for example, 'through Bushy-Park is delightful, inspiring at this time of year; and the gardens about it, with their close-clipped holly hedges and arbors of evergreen, look an artificial summer all the year round.' (Hazlitt, 1824, p. 42). The gardens represent a transitional stage between reality and the paintings Hazlitt had come to visit. Peter George Patmore, who accompanied Hazlitt on some of his visits to country houses and who plagiarised

the *Sketches* in his *British Galleries of Art* (1824, pp. 168–69) in his own writings, describes the approach to Dulwich Gallery, and then makes explicit the kind of explanation that Hazlitt felt was unnecessary:

The reader must not think that I am heedlessly calling upon him to attend to these objects of external nature, instead of leading him at once to those of which we are more immediately in search. I have purposely asked him to fix the former on his memory, and to yield himself for a moment to *their* influence exclusively, in order that, by a pleasing and not abrupt contrast, he may be the better prepared to appreciate the blush, the bloom, the burning glow of beauty that will fall upon his sense from the rich summer of Art that greets him on his entry to this exquisite Gallery.

Patmore is aping Hazlitt's critical method assembling a stock of natural impressions in his reader's mind that he then releases upon representations of nature inside the galleries he has travelled to.

From this perspective the role of painting is to return us in imagination to the realm of nature outside the gallery. In the eighteenth century, Jonathan Richardson made paintings take their viewers still further outdoors on vicarious adventures. In *The Theory of Painting* (1715, p. 7), he conceived of them taking on the role of windows on the world that we now rather associate with the armchair appreciation of television and DVDs:

By the help of this art we have the pleasure of seeing a vast variety of things and actions, of travelling by land or water, of knowing the humours of low life without mixing with it, of viewing tempests, battles, inundations, and in short, of all real, or imagined appearance in heaven, earth, or hell; and this as we sit at our ease, and cast our eye round a room: we may ramble with delight from one idea to another, or fix upon any as we please.

Though Gaunt commemorates this kind of adventure in the detourné scenic vignettes of hunters and rompers freed from the shelf in her childhood curtain series *Shelfless Life* (Figure 6), her architectural interiorisation of external realities often takes a different, even more hologramic form. One illusion in her work is to bring nature indoors by conspicuously releasing it from the frame of pictorial representation. Just as unframed flying ducks have more immediate presence on the wall than paintings do, the aptly titled *Material Whimsies* of 1999 (Figure 7) appropriates a section of gallery wall as if it was a painting but leaves one corner strategically incomplete. This ensures that, against the ghostly foil of an imaginary picture frame, applied fabric fragments enact an intensely naturalistic effect of *swarming*, whether of butterflies or other insects, but also that the wall still shows through as wall. *Untitled* of 2003 (Figure 8) brings abstracted leaf shapes from the rooftop garden of a private residence and translates them into a configuration that re-enacts the way leaves cluster and dissipate. The photograph is taken in such a way as to bring out the way the staircase and landing form the equivalent of three sides of a skewed picture frame, which is again a foil for their turbulence. Further equivocations between paintings and decorations include *Marginalia #5* (2003), a wall piece that, as its title implies, subverts pictures

into rectangular lengths of textile picked out by applied fragments on the wall and diagonally set so they wrap around corners and flap onto the floor. With *Vile Nil* of 1999 (Figure 9) it was a matter of placement. Has the diagonally set rectangle of wallpaper fragments risen from or slipped onto the floor, and has it done so as a modernist grid or a decorative textile? The directions and identities chiasmically change each other as they slip. All these works depend upon the hovering implication of framed paintings as negative space (Gaunt, 1997 and 2004). The advance in the current exhibition is the abandonment of rectangles in favour of the altogether more ambitious implication of a wave formation that consumes the entire gallery space. Yet if paintings and installations return us to nature by bringing it inside, the contrasting role of interior decoration is to abstract us from and put us at a civilising distance from nature. As James Ward (1892, p. 5) puts it, the decorator gives us 'those beauties from nature that have captivated him, and been transfused into ornament by the alembic of his mind.' So, in a different way, does Gaunt.

Interior decoration

Let us now consider how decoration interiorises the external realm. Early American Protestant town planning is founded on a progressive ordering and internalisation of nature. In *An Essay on Ordering Towns* (cited in Dryness, 2004, p. 214) anonymously published in New England in the 1630s the township is to be laid out in a series of concentric circles with the meeting house at 'the center of the whole circumference'.

Around this houses are arranged, 'orderly paced to enjoye the comfortable [sic] communion'. Outside these is a ring of common fields, with space for larger estates still further out. Beyond these estates are common 'swamps and rubbish waest grounds ... which harbor wolves and ... noisome beasts and serpents.' Finally one reaches the wilderness which may be areas owned by the town but not yet occupied ... This schema also reflects a common seventeenth-century attitude towards nature, which, like human nature, was wild and undisciplined, and needed to be broken.

William A. Dryness goes on to explain in his riveting book *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture: The Protestant Imagination from Calvin to Edwards* (2004, pp. 222–23) that artificial meant useful: decoration patterned lives. The structures of grounds, meeting houses and domestic interiors reflected the continuum of land from waste to improvement, that is, from wilderness to 'culture'. Geometrical formulae on furniture, walls and ceilings imposed order on chaotic nature in a manner that reflected the overall plan of the community. An extremely potent, contemporary perpetuation of this tradition can be found in the skyholes cut in the walls of meeting houses by the American Quaker artist James Turrell. Through the sparest human intervention of a frame, they constrain nature to serve art.



Figure 6. Pamela Gaunt, *Shelfless Life*, 2005, cut-out (mothers) curtains, textile medium, painted and collaged brackets, 64 x 220 x 22 cm.

Source: Robert Frith, Acorn Photo Agency.



Figure 7. Pamela Gaunt, *Material Whimsies*, 1999, recycled fabric and wax, 3.6 x 5.2 m.

Source: Robert Frith, Acorn Photo Agency.



Figure 8. Pamela Gaunt, *Untitled*, 2003, coloured and jet water cut 20 mm glass, 3.8 x 1.8 m. Artwork viewed from base of stairs, home of Lyn Hughes and Dr Graham Raad.

Source: Robert Frith, Acorn Photo Agency.



Figure 9. Pamela Gaunt, *Vile Nil*, 1999, aluminium, vinyl wallpaper, photocopy transfer, 280 x 280 cm.

Source: Robert Frith, Acorn Photo Agency.

Interior decoration integrated by a single designer began in eighteenth-century England with William Kent, Robert Adams and William Chambers and carried over into French Rococo later in the century. In these environments Protestant ordering of the civilised soul gave way to 'total works of art' where distance from the brute realities of nature and society was measured by playful frivolity. 'What makes the rococo almost unique is the combination of clarity and fluidity in the parts, and apparent chaos in the composition as a whole' (Trilling, 2003, pp. 33–34). This did not deprive Rococo interiors of the religious significance promoted by their Protestant counterparts, however.

Visitors to the charnel house beneath Santa Maria della Concezione dei Cappuccini in Rome will know that its decorations are composed of bones from more than 4000 skeletons brought down from the Quirinal from 1628 to 1870. The disarticulation of individual skeletons into promiscuously batched types of bone ensured an effect of almost impersonal freedom. Hundreds of skulls are piled up together and pinned back by wire netting into an architecture of alcoves in which only the occasional grinner beneath a cowl with a scythe in its hands remains intact to personify the abstract figure of Death. A clock made of real arm and finger-bones signifies the inexorable passage of time while everything else answers to the *memento mori* motto:

Where you are now so once were we,
Where we are now you soon shall be.

Perhaps this spectacle of human remains should seem macabre, but that is not how it comes across. On the contrary, the disposition of the most curvilinear bones — ribs, radiae and ulnae — into a flow of opposed c-scrolls that swerve around the formal borders of the walls emulate the most carefree Rococo drawing rooms. Here if anywhere a decorative interior modifies the visitor's sense of self. Why should the builders of a mass grave have aspired to such an elegantly whimsical effect? Because for an ardent Catholic community the prospect of the life everlasting was so real that death was naught but a joke, a mild velleity, polite enough for everyone to smile at. Many of Gaunt's more aberrant convoluted intricacies have a Rococo source. Without any suggestion of religious persuasion, the frippery of her brittle bouquets and coral flowers is qualified by something of a 'Dem Bones' effect at the cooler end of the emotional spectrum.¹

The American, British and French developments in interior decoration were made possible by the English acceptance of the invitation to take up polite architecture as Italians were already living it in Renaissance palaces. Erasmus's reflections on the causes of 'sweating-sickness' to Cardinal Wolsey's physician registers his disgust at an unhygienic pre-Humanist past. The floors of English houses are, he writes,

¹ These thoughts are drawn from and developed further in my 'Representing Trauma: the Case for Troubling Images' (Read, 2006, pp. 217–42), where the chapel receives fuller consideration.

generally spread with clay, and then with rushes from some marsh, which are renewed from time to time but so as to leave a basic layer, sometimes for twenty years, under which fester spittle, vomit, dogs' urine and men's too, dregs of beer and cast-off bits of fish, and other unspeakable kinds of filth. As the weather changes, this exhales a sort of miasma, which in my opinion is far from conducive to bodily health. (cited in Crowley, 2001, p. 49)

Partly for hygienic reasons monastic institutions had already articulated distinct spaces for the different domestic activities of praying, eating, sleeping, washing and excreting, while in Renaissance Paris, as Dominique Laporte evokes in his malodourously titled *History of Shit* (2002), legislation stipulating household responsibility for waste inaugurated processes of architectural individuation that eventuated in such novelties as raised beds in separated bedrooms.

Moving still further back in history, there were no permanent constructions in Britain before the Norman invasion. Cob or turf walls reinforced by wooden poles were the predominant materials. Long houses, the domicile that characterised most of Britain and large parts of the Continent, divided the human habitations from cattle only by a single wall. Humans defecated with the cattle in a central channel that manured the surrounding pastures. Only with the Great Rebuilding in the mid sixteenth-century were open hearths replaced by chimneypieces and separate rooms installed in upper stories (Crowley, 2001, pp. 19, 24 and 53). Yet I am not moving backwards in history to reinforce the prejudice that decoration evolves as civilisation progresses, for I hold that the humblest communities of the past and present world are decorated with as much complex functionality and aesthetic imagination as the wealthiest.²

The medieval scene fires the imagination of anyone interested in mobile conceptions of decoration. The French word 'meubles' suggests the buried sense of portable furnishings within the modern sense of 'mobiles' that the American kinetic sculptor Alexander Calder made famous. Nicholas Mander defines its original sense in his eye-opening essay on 'Painted Cloths: History, Craftsmen and Techniques':

Because they were cheaper, lighter and more portable than wood, the earlier cloths were used for temporary and ephemeral decorations, as furniture in an architectural context. Unlike wall-paintings, they were moveable (mobile, mobili, Möbel, meubles), adaptable in a world where landowners and ecclesiastics were constantly moving from one manor or religious house to another, where churches would be decorated seasonally for the feasts, festivals and colours of the liturgical cycle. In the medieval world, always hieratic, where court ceremonial was structured by elaborate rules of precedence, where each rank, degree, or estate, was marked by the privileged use of certain possessions, furniture and fabric, the most costly textiles would be reserved for such dignitaries, while lower down the social scale, and in apartments or areas reserved for men of

² For a fascinating account of the role of unmodified nature in the religious decoration of societies outside Europe, see Klein (1994, pp. 401–04). See also the discussion of London slum interiors towards the beginning of Massey, *Interior Design since 1900* (2008) and Robert Polidori's photographs of New Orleans interiors after Hurricane Katrina (Polidori, 2006).

lesser rank, coverings of painted cloth and canvas would have been the rule. Textiles and cloths were easily taken down and stored, but bare walls could be quickly transformed for the occasion by their use, with specific armorials and devices; for we know that textiles, like jewelry and Figure, possessed a special importance in the material equipment of the medieval household. (Mander, 1997, p. 119)

Today we think of paintings (from the French *tableaux* or tables) as portable, but this was then the priority of textile furnishings. Only later were they used to make a single, permanent residence habitable. Until then inventories always carefully distinguished meubles from tableaux.

The eventual ascent of paintings over furnishings in the hierarchies of taste was by no means without reversal. After the Golden Age of painting in seventeenth-century Holland, for example, innovators in porcelain, wallpaper and prints captured the eighteenth-century market for interior decoration that in the seventeenth century had been dominated by painters (de Vries, 1991, p. 270). Since picture frames were a crucial mediator in the battles between painters and interior decorators, I shall bring this historical excursus to a close with considerations that may illuminate the peculiarity that the pictorial images (if such they are) in Gaunt's *Errant Abstractions* are composed entirely of fragmentary painted frames. In so doing we rebound on our opening theme of the troubled boundaries between what is internal and external to the artwork and its setting.

Frames

The frames of medieval ecclesiastic altarpieces were essentially architectural in reflecting the cross section of the nave. In truth this only reflected a situation in which entire cities were frames within frames demarcating civic and religious zones of social power. In his great work on fourteenth-century Florentine ritual, Richard Trexler argued that

The Renaissance frame contained more than rich materials and craftsmanship, the child learned. It was often studded with discrete objects like jewels — not only valuable commercially but possessing a characterological value — and coats of arms, which were valuable because of the social honour of the families they represented. The spatially mediating frame thus also mediated material and moral values between devotees and enclosed images. In Leonardo's terms, the honour due to the *virtu* of the objects was the frame. The more honourable the materials, the more valuable the object was to the patron; for the more honourable the patron whose arms stood on the frame, the more valuable the object to those who viewed it. (Trexler, 1980, p. 92)

Ecclesiastical frames gave rise to religious images in the home. With 'the rise of devotional piety and the diffusion of inexpensive panel paintings throughout the marketplace, Italians could take pictures home with them and into their

private lives.’ There they developed secular content and functions through a new consumer mentality that ‘represented not just the objectification of cultural values but the rationalisation of possessiveness in an expanding world of goods’ (Goldthwaite, 1993, pp. 142 and 247). As circular double-sided birth trays (*dische de parte*), for example, they served in bedrooms as erotic talismans to stimulate the mothers’ imaginations to conceive and visually imprint beautiful (usually male) offspring. As double-sided paintings stored in bags the function of portraits was to signify the legal presence of the person they represented. On either side of the painting, ‘sign (crest) and image (portrait) were like legal documents in the inheritance of family rights. Crest symbolised rights to inheritance, and portrait acted as a different kind of “evidence” ’ (Belting, 2001, pp. 5 and 12).

The important innovation of painting on stretched canvas (derived from painted drapery) as an alternative to panel painting greatly spurred the rising aesthetic status of painting in Renaissance courts, despite decline in the value of artistic materials that use of canvas implied (Brettell, 1986, p. 12). According to Vasari, canvas painting gained currency because its lighter weight allowed pictures to be transported between courts more quickly and efficiently than heavy panels. The employment of painters with enough virtuosity in this medium to quickly satisfy their courtly patrons’ need for topical propaganda of the highest standard contributed to the emergence of political states that used their distinctive art and culture to represent themselves effectively to each other (Warnke, 1993, pp. 209–11).

Meanwhile, the rising status of canvas painting affected the status of its frame. As paintings became charged with the personal stamp of the artist the making of frames was increasingly delegated to lesser decorative artists, but this provided the picture-framers with an unexpected opportunity. In his fascinating essay on ‘The Frame and the Development of the Portable Easel Picture’, Richard R. Brettell explains how:

These new frame makers were anxious, in the end, to rob pictures of their power, to put them ‘in their place,’ so to speak, in the larger and more literal schemes of architecture and the decorative arts. Hence frames increasingly controlled their pictures, surrounding them with previous penumbra of decorations that were related more to the rooms that held them, to furniture nearby, or to the coat of arms of their owners, than to the pictures themselves ... Yet, as the powers of the individual artist became more important than the intrinsic value of the materials he used, frames not only retained, but also extended their sheer material splendour. (Brettell, 1986, p. 12)

In Tudor England, as in Holland and Italy, portrait paintings continued to highlight dynastic links and alliances within an architectural context of decorative schemes rather than for their intrinsic aesthetic value. In seventeenth-century Holland the best paintings were less expensive than other luxury goods such as jewelry or silver Figure or porcelain. Mostly anonymous in execution, they were valued for emotional and (again) dynastic rather than aesthetic or economic reasons, as a

matter of 'art for *life's* sake' rather than art for art's sake (Brettell, 1986, p. 172). Yet although paintings were 'primarily an expression of rank and class' (Mander, 1997, p. 125) within their frames they contributed to the thematic patterning of the walls on which they hung. Thus in eighteenth-century England portraits were *zoned* in particular areas of a country house according to degrees of closeness to the immediate family. William Salmon (1678, p. 160) specified that royal and noble portraits should be hung in the dining room, 'other draughts of the life, of Persons of Honour, intimate or special friends, and acquaintance' be placed in the withdrawing room and portraits of wives and children in the bedroom.

While interior decorations of the Roman era had sometimes demonstrated the highest intellectual sophistication in mediating between several levels of illusion (Bryson, 2001, pp. 17–55), there are times when paintings, so meaningful today, were primarily appreciated as decorative patterns with slender intrinsic merit in them. In sixteenth-century northern Europe artists were depicting 'spacious rooms in private residences with pictures stacked cheek by jowl and floor to ceiling, completely covering the walls'. From 1663 the same kind of display was adopted for public exhibitions at the French Royal Academy where 'art was treated as decoration, its placement guided by the eighteenth century's obsession with balance and symmetry (Newhouse, 2005, p. 19).

In seventeenth-century Dutch houses the same convention of 'skying' paintings was occasioned by the structural consideration of 'the narrow strip of wall between the ceiling and the wall'. Dutch doll's houses and paintings of domestic interiors suggest that paintings were arranged in vertical and horizontal alignments with doors, fireplaces and furnishings in 'an almost obsessive concern with symmetry' (Muzelaar and Phillips, 2003, p. 44).

In amateur's cabinets of the eighteenth century, likewise, paintings might be positioned either side of a 'central vertical axis ... to produce a harmoniously arranged wall, rather than to show the individual paintings to their best advantage (Bonfante-Warren, 2000, p. 26). True, such 'gentlemanly hangs', whether in England, Italy, or France, were designed to cultivate the exercise of judgment and good taste that determined membership of an educated elite, but this was accomplished in an essentially decorative manner by grouping pictures in 'contrasting examples from opposing schools ... the better to show off their particular qualities of drawing, color and composition' (Duncan, 2004, p. 255). 'Secondary consecrations' of this kind (to use Pierre Bourdieu's term (1993)) was also an opportunity for powerful collectors to reframe paintings within standardised frames to stamp uniform possession on them. 'Frames gave an external unity to the diversity of the paintings within them' (Brettell, 1986, p. 39).

The gentlemanly hang was the organisational basis of the first public galleries, such as the Louvre, but in the nineteenth century they ceded to geographical and chronological arrangements that interpellated visitors not as aristocrats but as rational citizens following the development of progressive states whose degree of civilisation was measured against the art of other states (Read, 2010, pp. 63–65), a system that prevails in major public galleries today. A high ranking civil

servant recently expressed the view to the present author that a projected new gallery complex in Western Australia should be billed as 'a splendid opportunity to tell the story of WA'.

The decorative sensibility of the gentlemanly hang was lost to state galleries. It passed instead to the nineteenth-century departmental store where its élitism was associated with feminised, individualistic interiority. 'Interior décor, which had been an exercise in historicism (i.e. period rooms) was transformed in the later nineteenth century into a species of self-expression, with each object, work of art, and choice of colour or fabric being a reflection of the individual.' As a defence against an increasingly classless society, purchasers could at least take refuge in interior spaces that felt psychologically privileged and which commercial interests were quick to individualise by increasing the range of home furnishings in department stores from which individuals could purchase (Mainardi, 1993, pp. 110–11). Such lavishly decorated inner sancta placed a heavy burden on individual paintings that were now expected to transcend the everyday reality of these already exoticised settings, a pressure on the artist that is graphically recorded as early as 1819 in a reviewer's lament at the fate of a portrait on display in Boston by the American painter Samuel F.B. Morse:

Our able countryman Morse has finished another splendid picture, which was exhibited this week, and his rooms were *crowded* with those who are vulgarly styled '*the gay*' and '*the great*'. — but — reader ... these wise great ones — (wise, because *rich*) in ninety-nine instances out of a hundred, admired the frame, in preference to the picture. 'Oh, what an elegant frame!!' 'Did you ever see the like?' was the general exclamation of the bon ton, and Mr. Doggett, the frame maker, gathered all the laurels at the expense of Mr. Morse the artist. (Staiti, 1989, p. 69)

It was amidst the plethora of mass-produced frames enclosing photographs and lithographs as well as pictures that painters began to reclaim the picture frame as part of their own creation. Whistler, for example, took sole responsibility for the decoration of his frames, creating 'simple, unadorned rectangles, duly gilded so as not to break with the grayed palettes of the pictures within'. The Impressionists and Post-Impressionists followed him until the point was reached when, 'for the modern artist, the frame once again became part of the picture' (Brettell, 1986, p. 14), though Mondrian, when asked what should happen if a painting did not fit in with one of his neo-plastic environments, replied that you could turn it to the wall. This was hardly intended as a capitulation of art to design, but a subtle derangement of those serried and symmetrical ranks of paintings in the salon hang and an enlargement of the frame to encapsulate the entire room:

He hung his coloured-paper squares ... in erratic rows, groupings that seemed carefully unplanned, sometimes in little constellations ... He kept them away from each other, but not so far that they forgot each other. Each square remained mostly a single perception that said blue, red, yellow, white. An occasional gestalt offered itself. It is easy to see that this studio was a proto-gallery. (O'Doherty, 2007, pp. 35–36)

Competing with the gallery wall and enveloping the spectator in a sea of colour, vast, unframed American Abstract Expressionist canvases broke free of what was considered the tyrannical constraint of the European frame. From Tàpies in Spain, the Support-Surface group in Paris and Arte Povera in Italy, however, the European reply to the expansionism of vast American Expressionist canvases was to take frames and stretchers down from the walls to make them equal partners with spectators both within and beyond the gallery space.

Gaunt is firmly within the tradition of sculptured painting and exploded frames that perpetuated these tendencies in works by Frank Stella and Juan Davila.



Figure 10. Pamela Gaunt, *Errant Abstractions* (detail), 2008, stenciled and painted industrially routed MDF, glue, etch primer and automotive paint.

Source: Tony Nathan.

While espousing principles of spatial transgression and imbalance, however, her show by no means repudiates the traditional ornamental attributes of stability, repetition, contrast, symmetry, radiation, repose, variety, subordination, unity and series that characterise traditional design principles. The escape from the status quo is rather through implosions of time than Stella's and Davila's ruptures of space. I have said that *Errant Abstractions* are entirely composed of fragments of frames. Themselves unframed except for fringes of shadow, frames constitute both their images and substance. Likewise, the mirrored or semi-mirrored *Partners in Crime Series*, on the far wall, constitute their own frames as they miniaturise the spectator within a spectral reflection of the entire exhibition. They are a *multum in parvo*.

Leibniz wrote of the monad. The universe contained in the grain of sand on a beach that belongs to a globe that is itself a grain of sand on the beach of a larger universe. The same unpackings can happen with time. The image of the eighteenth-century candelabra in the *Dingbat Series* near the door is

composed of 1990s dingbats composed of 1940s motorcycles. To return to an initial question: how might these monadic shifts of temporal style change the experience we bring into the gallery? Personally they have prompted me to bring a series of texts on the social function of superseded pictorial and decorative schemes into uncusomary relations with each other, but it seems to me that Gaunt's mobiles twirl and eddy in many other strange winds that history blows upon them. Earlier I adverted to Benjamin's account of the anachronistic image in the Arcades project. The anachronistic image is a dialectical image: 'for while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent? Only dialectical images are genuine images (that is, not archaic)'. In his 'On the Concept of History' (1940) Benjamin's 'dialectical image' is eclipsed by the 'monad', which is 'no metaphorical constellation of fixed stars: it is more like a momentous conjunction'. Anachronism in Gaunt's work is monadic in this way. Its purpose is not to release the significance of the past, but to signal a 'Messianic cessation ... of happening ... a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past' (Auerbach, 2007, n.p.). The doubling-up effects of the Alhambra, where 'abstract outlines have the local effect of arresting the wandering arabesques, but on the large scale they build up repeating star and lozenge shape configurations of colour and line which have a criss-crossing movement of their own' (Brett, 2005, p. 139), are certainly part of the congestion and release here (Figure 10), for the temporal hybridity is also multicultural.

Throughout this paper we have seen that relational aesthetics has a very long history indeed in the sedimented interactions between the professions that combined their skills to embellish interiors so as to please and surprise their occupants. We have also appreciated how apt it is to view conflict rather than harmony as the more powerful agency in these ever-changing collaborations. In admitting more of the past than we expect, works such as Gaunt's not only help to shine a light on this history, but may also age in such a way as to enlarge the chance of momentous conjunctions with conditions of reception that cannot yet be anticipated, and so continue to act as an abrasive upon contemporary amnesia in unexpected ways, as every artefact in its own way does if time allows it to.

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Current calls for papers and announcements

Closing soon: Call for papers for issue #5 (2013)

A World in Making: Cities Craft Design

Guest edited by Suzie Attiwill

The call for papers for issue 5 was extended to 30 October 2012 due to the transfer of *craft + design enquiry* to ANU. For this issue, guest editor Suzie Attiwill is calling for papers on the theme of *A World In Making: Cities Craft Design* and the intersect between urban planning, craft and design. This call for papers closes soon. Late submission enquiries should be made as soon as possible to jenny.deves@anu.edu.au

Announcing a call for papers for a new general section in *craft + design enquiry*

From the next issue, *craft + design enquiry* will also include a new general section open to papers on any aspect of contemporary craft and design research. All papers in the general section will be peer-reviewed in accordance with existing *craft + design enquiry* procedures. Papers will be selected to go forward for peer-reviewing on submission of a fully completed paper. Submission closing dates are:

30 October 2012 for publication in c+de#5 (2013)

30 June 2013 for publication in c+de#6 (2014)

For further information, a Submission Lodgement Form and Author Guidelines contact jenny.deves@anu.edu.au

Announcing a call for themes/editors for future issues

Expressions of interest (200 words) are called for theme ideas on any aspect of contemporary craft and design for future issues. EOIs might include proposal of guest editor/s (including self-nomination) with specialist expertise appropriate to the proposed theme. Email to jenny.deves@anu.edu.au

Announcing a new call for papers for issue #6 (2014)

Craft • Material • Memory

Guest edited by Anne Brennan and Patsy Hely

Craft is often invoked as an antidote to change, its materials and practices described and inscribed in terms of continuity and tradition. However, this is a comparatively recent idea that has its roots in the turbulent moment of the Industrial Revolution, a way of negotiating and at times resisting the huge economic, social and cultural changes that were sweeping Europe at the time. Some argue that we are currently experiencing a similar period of profound upheaval as we grapple with the implications of climate change, globalisation and the impact of the information revolution on our societies and cultures. Perhaps it is no coincidence that this period of change is mirrored by a resurgence of interest in relationships between craft and memory, particularly in relation to the specific histories of certain practices, and also to the histories and experiences of individuals. This issue of *craft + design enquiry* invites papers that will re-examine and re-evaluate relationships between craft, materials and memory at a time of global change.

One possible thread of enquiry might address material histories, engaging with the way in which the histories, usages and even composition and production of traditional craft materials has shifted and changed over time. What might be the implications of these shifts and changes, and how have contemporary political, social, cultural and environmental exigencies shaped the way in which such materials are made, used and considered today?

Another thread of enquiry might explore relationships between craft and the archive. As museums and archives shift and change in response to the contemporary world, new ways of viewing objects and different interpretive strategies are constantly in play. Craft and design scholarship has expanded considerably over the last decades. How are crafted objects in collections being differently interpreted and understood in the light of these changes?

A third line of enquiry might attend to relationships between craft, memory and individual histories. Autobiographical strategies on the part of both makers and writers about craft developed as a way of undermining the imposition of the aesthetic priorities of the fine arts on craft, and as a way of investing craft's objects with meanings that recognise the way in which objects circulate through lives and cultures. The editors are particularly interested in papers that re-evaluate and re-imagine these strategies, in particular papers that question some of the more comforting connections that have been made between craft's histories and practices and autobiography as the locus of an unproblematic and idealised past.

— Anne Brennan and Patsy Hely, guest editors *craft + design enquiry* #6

Anne Brennan is an artist and writer and the head of the Art Theory Workshop of the ANU School of Art. A founding member of Gray Street Workshop, she has written extensively on the visual arts, craft and design. Her research interests encompass the ways in which private and public memories coalesce in institutions such as the memorial and the archive. She has undertaken a number of projects in archives and museums, including *Secure the Shadow* at the Hyde Park Barracks, Sydney, with Anne Ferran in 1995 and *Archives and the Everyday* at the Australian War Memorial in 1996. She is currently engaged in a writing project about memory and place.

Patsy Hely is an academic and artist working in the field of ceramics. Her work is held in many national public collections and she has exhibited widely in Australia and in a number of countries internationally. She was awarded a doctorate in 2007. She has worked at a number of institutions, including Sydney University Tin Sheds, COFA and Southern Cross University. She is Convenor of the Honours programme at the ANU School of Art.

Steps to submitting a paper for c+de#6

This issue of *craft + design enquiry* will be published by ANU E Press mid 2014. The call for papers closes on 30 June 2013.

Step 1: Anne Brennan and Patsy Hely (guest editors) ask contributors to submit an abstract from now until 30 March 2013. They will respond promptly to contributors about their proposed papers. Send your abstract to jenny.deves@anu.edu.au

Step 2: Following advice from the guest editors, contributors are required to complete and submit their final papers by 30 June 2013. Email jenny.deves@anu.edu.au for a Submission Lodgement Form to be submitted with your paper. Further information and Guidelines for Authors may be obtained from jenny.deves@anu.edu.au

About *craft + design enquiry*

Focus and scope

craft + design enquiry is an open access, peer-reviewed, online journal promoting and disseminating the research excellence generated by and about the craft and design sector. *craft + design enquiry* investigates the contribution that contemporary craft and design makes to society, establishing a dialogue between craft and design practice and cultural, social and environmental concerns. It interrogates and expands the international recognition of Australian craft and design.

craft + design enquiry welcomes submissions from across the field of craft and design including artists and practitioners, curators, historians, art and cultural theorists, educationalists, museum professionals, philosophers, scientists and any others with a stake in the future developments of craft and design. Issues of *craft + design enquiry* are published annually.

craft + design enquiry is published by ANU E Press. Specialist guest editors are appointed to each issue of *craft + design enquiry*. Calls for papers are announced once a year on specific themes and research areas for future issues. Submitted papers are peer-reviewed and selected papers are published in *craft + design enquiry*.

Peer-review process

craft + design enquiry is a peer-reviewed journal. The *craft + design enquiry* Editorial Advisory Panel is composed of internationally recognised experts and academics, who provide reviews in the fields of their expertise. Each paper is reviewed by at least two peers. The process uses a double-blind, review process where contributors and peer reviewers remain anonymous throughout the review process. Reviewers may request changes to papers.

Contributors are asked to ensure their identities are not revealed in any way within their paper and that the paper is not submitted to other publications during the review process with *craft + design enquiry* and Craft Australia. (See Submissions/Author Guidelines.) If favourably reviewed, and at the discretion of the *craft + design enquiry* editorial team and Craft Australia, the paper will be published in *craft + design enquiry* e-journal.

Open access policy

This journal provides immediate online, open access to its content on the principle that making research freely available to the public supports a greater global exchange of knowledge.

History

Established as an initiative of the Craft Australia Research Centre, *craft + design enquiry* was developed in 2008 by Craft Australia and personnel from The Australian National University and first published by Craft Australia in 2009. In 2012 *craft + design enquiry* moved to The Australian National University, where it is hosted by the School of Art and published by ANU E Press.

Editorial Board

The *craft + design enquiry* Editorial Board membership is currently drawn from The Australian National University, other member institutions of the Australian Council of University Art and Design Schools (ACUADS) and the Australian Craft and Design Centres (ACDC) network organisations. This membership covers a broad range of expertise in training and professional practice in craft and design.

The Editorial Board is responsible for defining the policy and objectives of *craft + design enquiry*, for determining themes, appointing guest editors and overseeing the management of the e-journal. The current membership of the Editorial Board is:

Anne Brennan, School of Art, The Australian National University

Louise Hamby, Research School of Humanities, The Australian National University

Patsy Hely, School of Art, The Australian National University

Peter McNeil, University of Technology Sydney

Kevin Murray, RMIT University, University of Melbourne, Monash University

Avi Amesbury, Craft ACT: Craft and Design Centre

Jenny Deves, Managing editor — ex-officio

Guest editors

Each issue of *craft + design enquiry* features a themed section overseen by a specialist guest editor appointed by the Editorial Board. Guest editors to date:

Amanda Ravetz, Editor, Migratory practices in craft and design, Volume 1, 2009

Louise Hamby, Editor, Cross cultural exchanges in craft and design, Volume 2, 2010

Kevin Murray, Editor, Sustainability in craft and design, Volume 3, 2011

Peter McNeil, Co-Editor, Relational craft and design, Volume 4, 2012

Rosemary Hawker, Co-Editor, Relational craft and design, Volume 4, 2012

Suzie Attiwill, Editor, A World In Making: Cities Craft Design, Volume 5, 2013 (forthcoming)

Anne Brennan, Co-editor, Craft • Material • Memory, Volume 6, 2014 (forthcoming)

Patsy Hely, Co-editor, Craft • Material • Memory, Volume 6, 2014 (forthcoming)

Editorial Advisory Panel

The Editorial Advisory Panel provides advice to the guest editor/s of each issue and to the Editorial Board through provision of reviewing services. *craft + design enquiry* relies on the specialist expertise represented by the Editorial Advisory Panel. The Editorial Advisory Panel, building with each new issue, currently includes:

Keith Armstrong, Queensland University of Technology, Australia

Grace Cochrane, Australia

Kirsty May Darlston, Australia

Pippa Dickson, Australia

Steven Dixon, Manchester Metropolitan University, United Kingdom

Helen Ennis, The Australian National University, Australia

Tony Fry, Griffith University, Australia

Paul Greenhalgh, University of East Anglia, United Kingdom

Eugenie Keefer Bell, Faculty of Arts and Design, University of Canberra, Australia

Janice Lally, Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia

Kay Lawrence, University of South Australia, Australia

Roger Leong, National Gallery of Victoria, Australia

Margaret Maynard, University of Queensland adjunct, Australia

Andrew Montana, The Australian National University, Australia

Gail Nichols, Australia

Sharon Peoples, The Australian National University, Australia

Amanda Ravetz, University of Manchester, United Kingdom

Simona Segret Reinach, Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia, IUAV, Italy

Soumitri Varadarajan, RMIT, Australia

Soumhya Venkatesan, University of Manchester, United Kingdom

Malte Wagenfeld, RMIT, Australia

Liz Williamson, College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, Australia

Diana Wood-Conroy, University of Wollongong, Australia

Ross Woodrow, Griffith University, Australia

ACDC network organisations

craft + design enquiry works with the Australian Craft and Design Centres (ACDC) network of organisations in communicating with the professional craft and design sector across Australia. The network is a group of peak organisations from all states and territories in Australia that represent the professional craft and design sector. The organisations engage with the sector at a local, national and international level and offer services and programs that support sustainable practice.

Artisan (Brisbane Qld)

<http://www.artisan.org.au>

Australian Tapestry Workshop (Melbourne Vic)

<http://www.austapestry.com.au>

Canberra Glassworks (Canberra ACT)

<http://www.canberraglassworks.com>

Craft ACT: Canberra Craft and Design Centre (Canberra ACT)

<http://www.craftact.org.au>

Craft Victoria (Melbourne VIC)

<http://www.craftvic.org.au>

Craft South: Centre for Contemporary Craft and Design (Adelaide SA)

<http://www.craftsouth.org.au>

Design Centre Tasmania (Launceston TAS)

<http://designcentre.com.au>

Form (Perth WA)

<http://www.form.net.au>

JamFactory: Contemporary Craft and Design (Adelaide SA)

<http://www.jamfactory.com.au>

Object: Australian Centre for Craft and Design (Sydney NSW)

<http://www.object.com.au>

Sturt Contemporary Australian Craft (Mittagong NSW)

<http://www.sturt.nsw.edu.au>

Territory Craft (Darwin NT)

<http://www.territorycraft.org.au>

ACUADS institutions

craft + design enquiry acknowledges the assistance of member institutions of the Australian Council of University Art and Design Schools (ACUADS). ACUADS represents over 30 Australian university and TAFE art and design faculties, schools and departments. ACUADS is the peak body of university visual arts, crafts and design. For further information: <http://www.acuads.com.au>

