

MATERIAL REMAINS

Linden New Art

Work by:

Sarah crowEST

Martin Kantor

Isabella Darcy

Shannon Slee

Casey Jeffery

Madeleine Joy Dawes

Rebecca Diele

Curated by:

Izzy Baker,

Mia Palmer-Verevis,

and Freddie Wright



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Remnants and Recollections: Archival Impulses in Textile Art – Mia Palmer-Verevis

Fabric has a distinct ability to possess inextricable cultural significance, with memory and nostalgia embedded in the weave of its composition. The intimacy of the utility of fabric – clothing for protection and warmth, as well as aesthetic expression – creates universal significance across many interlacing political and social histories through the means of sensation, utility, and aesthetics. Guided by an archival instinct, Shannon Slee, Casey Jeffery and Isabella Darcy are united by their use of found and forgotten materials to preserve and revive the salient qualities of fabric, forging an intersection between the political and personal. Pulling from collections of pattern, texture, folds, and thread, textile art transforms material into a site for the cohabitation of previously dismissed cultural languages, the critique of commodification, and the interrogation of social artefacts.

Darcy and Slee's archival tendencies draw from the repurposing of garments in their physical state, recalling modernist traditions of assemblage. Inherent to the nature of assemblage is "associational poetry", where additional meaning can be drawn from the interactions between the connotations of the original form of various materials.¹ Darcy's works are composed of an archived collection of cotton t-shirts, denim, and tartan, stripped of their wearability but maintaining the cultural connotations of each individual. The diverse associations of each material establish a "constellation of meanings that are independent of the colours, textures and forms which are its carriers", thereby creating a web of intimate relationality.² Here, the medium of textile is used as a vehicle to investigate intersecting narratives such as cultural aesthetics, consumerism, and mass-production.

In a watershed essay on archival art, Hal Foster understands the intention of archival art as "to recoup failed visions in art, philosophy, and everyday life into the possible scenarios of alternative kinds of social relations, to transform the no-place of the archive into the no-place of a utopia".³ This recognition of the transformative influence of archival artworks pinpoints what compels Slee to revisit forgotten narratives – to unearth alternative histories in familiar objects. By incorporating found dresses and skirts to interrogate the legacy of material in gender and workforce politics within both personal memory and shared histories, Slee's works illuminate forgotten narratives in feminist protest. Transforming remnants of archived fabric into an amorphous quilted form, the artist retrieves textiles from the recesses of memory and history, seeing them recontextualised to the symbolic forefront of pertinent social histories.

Jeffery's archival practice recalls visual references with a unique cultural specificity. The artist uses found material as content, rather than as a medium, resurfacing forgotten patterns and colour schemes that harbour a wealth of nostalgia. Recreating the folds of curtain fabric in a realist visual language that recalls the tradition of drapery in portraiture, used to magnify character and emotion. The vibrant, graphic designs on the canvases resonate with a cultural demographic reminding one of the designs and colour palettes of blankets, cushions, and for Jeffery specifically, curtains. Following Jeffery's Nonno's migration to Australia in the 1950s, he worked as a waterproofer for Brella window blinds. In skilful visual realism, the artist replicates not only the patterns of the fabrics, many of which Jeffery's Nonno passed down to her, but also the quality of the fabrics, with movement and folds that reveal the tactile life of the material itself.

Through the renewal of archival materials, the practices of Darcy and Slee, and Jeffery reflect the unique relationship between textiles and storytelling, which oscillates from intimate associations to universal histories. By resituating the fibres and aesthetics of culturally specific materials, thereby creating a separation between

form and utility, textiles are shown to be a vessel for memory, place, and time.

The Limits of Abstraction – Izzy Baker

Fabric is seemingly always on route to function. Threads are woven into material and sewn into clothes, curtains, table clothes and blankets, put on bodies and in homes, serving practical and symbolic functions, a reflection of our identities. When fabric is presented without use, delineated as textile art, it remains psychically tied to this primary life, not devoid of function, but momentarily recused. What is fabric as a form and concept, removed from the web of history, identity, economics and culture it tends to ensnare in? In their works, Sarah crowEST, Casey Jeffery, Madeleine Joy Dawes and Rebecca Diele explore fabric as a form.

Fluidity is inherent to fabric, constituting a challenge for representation: how can an artist capture a subject that refuses to sit still? In 5th Century BC Greece, the artist Parrhasius won a painting competition by rendering silk curtains so realistic that his opponent tried to draw them apart.⁴ Like a magic trick, trompe l'oeil – the pictorial optical illusion achieved by Parrhasius – requires enormous effort to appear effortless.⁵ While the magician tries to master chance, the artist freezes reality. In both, the delight lies with the receiver, whose understanding of the world is momentarily fractured at the artist's hand, opening a renewed curiosity in perception.

In her works, *You don't know what you can't see (Kilsyth)* (2019) and *Baby Alpaca Check* (2022), Jeffery paints a trompe l'oeil of fabric. In *Preservation (nuts and bolts)* (2019) and *Preservation (sprinkle bread)* (2019) Dawes too conjures the appearance of material – this time lace, rendered through thousands of precise pen marks. Diele's *Melodic Reminders (Untitled 03)* (2021) is also a kind of illusion, stitched paper that when manipulated with water evokes fabric mid-crumple. Unlike Jeffery and Dawes however, Diele's practice embraces randomness, her ordered stitches at the whim of another fluid force: water. In all their works, one of fabric's formal qualities – its resistance to fixedness – is captured without any fabric present.

Thinking about fabric as a form is to consider the fold in and of itself. For Gilles Deleuze, "the fold" was a metaphor for being in suspension, forever stuck or in the middle of things. Located in Baroque literature, he suggested that the fold also speaks to the modern experience of perpetually becoming.⁶ In her work, crowEST summons this constantness of change; *DON'T TUNE OUT IF YOU HEAR SILENCE* (2016) sits between functional apparel and when stretched, an abstract canvas, evoking both an apron and minimalist work of art. While literal folds are absent, the idea of moving between states remains, forever oscillating between forms.

Fabric cannot escape this – it is a surface and concealment, strong yet supple, duality part of its essence. For Jeffery and Dawes, this is an artistic challenge well met. For Diele it is a mnemonic device for how we construct memory and identity, careful stitches colliding with uncontrollable forces. crowEST draws our attention to fabric's unique formal and philosophical qualities, its resistance to a single index. In these artists' works, abstraction is a slight of hand – even when presented apart from the body, fabric cannot help but enfold with ideas beyond its weave.

Threads, Stitches and Social Fabric – Freddie Wright

Society is often compared to a "fabric," woven together from the threads of countless interactions between individuals. This metaphor of the social fabric allows us to understand how various historical elements have shaped our society.

The slow process of sewing, stitch by stitch, creates

our social fabric. It is within the fibres and folds that individuals are connected, forming out shared histories. In *Material Remains*, we witness an exploration of the connections between the countercultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s and its bearing on the present day, through disparate modes and models of practice. This exploration includes tracing these connections within the changing landscape of St Kilda itself.

The countercultural wave of the '60s cast a wide shadow over the bohemian years of St Kilda, in both the birth and decline of countercultural ideals. The counterculture of the '60s became a global movement that emphasised individuality, women's rights, and a challenging of authority. We can observe the remnants of these legacies in the works of Sarah crowEST, Shannon Slee, and Martin Kantor.

crowEST's piece, *DON'T TUNE OUT IF YOU HEAR SILENCE* (2016), weaves together the histories of protest textiles, harnessing the subversive power of textiles. The phrase "don't tune out if you hear silence" is a literal reference to pirate radio and its unreliable transmissions. However, it is reinterpreted here as a commentary on the lost utopia that those broadcasters dreamt of and the subsequent silence we inhabit – the empty streets and bars of St Kilda. Despite the absence of previous utopian ideals, we are urged to continue our engagement during periods of silence we have inherited.

Slee's *Quilt for Ansett Flights South* (2022) focuses on repairing and reconnecting with the past rather than dwelling on the loss of utopia. Ansett airlines offered flights from Queensland to Sydney through the charity Children by Choice to provide access to contraceptive and abortion services, which were illegal in Queensland at the time. Inspired by the A-line hems worn by women undertaking this journey, the quilt symbolises emotional comfort. These "comforters" serve as a gift sent back in time, preserving the past and bridging our present sympathies with the individual memories of the courageous women who faced these daunting tasks. Through this, we acknowledge and recognise past mistakes while honouring those whose sacrifices paved the way for the right to contraceptive care.

Kantor's *Untitled (Victorian Tapestry Workshop)* (1986) subtly alludes to the forgotten or hidden quality of the individuals within the counterculture. Through an atmospheric mise-en-scène, the viewer catches glimpses of the person behind the artwork, albeit hazily obscured. The individual remains unnamed, which is unusual for Kantor, who typically titles his photographs with the subject's name.

By exploring the countercultural values of individuality, women's rights, and the challenge to authority, viewers can find guiding points to navigate the social and historical currents subtly addressed throughout the exhibition.

¹ William Chapin Seitz, *The Art of Assemblage*, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1961), 84.

² Seitz, 83.

³ Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse," *October* 110, (Fall 2004): 22.

⁴ Alicia Hernandez, "Zeuxis and Parrhasius," *Brown University*, July 2, 2023, https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Joukowsky_Institute/courses/greekpast/4891.html.

⁵ Alberto Corsin Jiménez, "Introduction" in *An Anthropological Trompe L'Oeil for a Common World: An Essay on the Economy of Knowledge* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013), 3-30.

⁶ Brian Massumi, "Introduction: Like a Thought" in *A Shock to Thought: Expression after Deleuze and Guattari*, ed. Brian Massumi, xiii-xxviii.

This exhibition takes place on the Bunurong Boon Wurrung Country and acknowledges the Yaluk-ut Weelam clan of the Boon Wurrung as the traditional custodians of this land. We offer our respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging, and to all Australian First Nations people.

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Poster designed by Alexis Infeld

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