



FANTASIES

Hannah Gartside



The sleepover, 2018

Front Cover: *Dissolved nightie in lilac, 2018*

Some of my earliest memories involve fabric...

Some of my earliest memories involve fabric: my fingers tracing the light filtering through a thin cotton top sheet pulled over my head in bed; the textures of the scraps that my mother assembled lovingly into a small patchwork quilt; the horror of seeing felt pen ink creeping up the grain of the dangling satin sash of my special bridal party flower-girl dress; the delightful stretch and grip of the green jersey dress my great-aunt brought home for me after her trip to Paris in the 1970s. As Robyn Gibson has pointed out, “clothes have the capacity to conjure up intimate memories” (2015, xv), but it has been my experience that it is the fabric itself that absorbs these memories. The touch of brushed nylon fills me with the dread of childhood terrors.

Women, abstraction and fabric are braided together in the history of modern art: from Emilie Flöge’s radically geometric caftans, designed in tandem with Vienna Secessionist Gustav Klimt (Wagener 1989, 31), to Sonia Delaunay’s patchwork baby quilt (1911), which is now displayed in museum exhibitions as an exploration of geometry and texture more than a domestic textile. Delaunay boasted in the 1960s that the quilt was acknowledged as “one of the first abstract paintings” (Butterfield-Rosen 2014, 207). In recent years, the long neglected or under-appreciated textile practices of women artists have been increasingly visible. In last year’s Documenta 14 and Venice Biennale exhibitions, fabric and thread were ubiquitous. Sheila Hick’s *Escalade Beyond Chromatic Lands* in the Arsenale in Venice was irresistible to the many visitors tempted to touch it, and a taste of Hicks’ retrospective exhibition, *Lignes de Vie* at the Centre Pompidou this year. Similarly, Cecilia Vicuña’s *Quipu Womb* (*The Story of the Red Thread*, Athens) (2017) and *Quipu Gut* (2017) were essential elements of the controversial Documenta installs in Athens and Kassel respectively.

Hannah Gartside completed her degree in sculpture and spatial practice at VCA in Melbourne in 2016. Prior to this, she graduated from an Honours degree in fashion at QUT in 2010, where I first encountered her work. Her Honours project was a complex interaction of doll play and sewing, where she evoked the presence of lost time and grief through repurposed men’s shirting. As a fashion student, she appeared most interested in the sense memory embedded in fabric. The subsequent five years she spent working as a classical ballet costume maker and theatre dresser made her even more conscious of the relationship between fabric and the body. In her visual arts studies Gartside was encouraged to leave fabric alone for a while, to see what other aesthetic and material languages she could speak, but the cloth called her back. When a close friend gifted Gartside ten metres of synthetic fabric and a double layered 1970s nightdress, it was all the encouragement she needed to return to this familiar material in her sculptural work.

Gartside cites the influence of a diverse range of artists on her work, including Sarah Lucas, Rebecca Horn and Fiona Hall, but it is Louise Bourgeois' maxim that the needle can be a tool of forgiveness that resonates most deeply in the work (in Bernadac and Obrist 1998, 222). Bourgeois' differentiation between the reparative qualities of the needle and the aggressive stabbing of the pin points to a tension also present in Gartside's work, where fabric is sometimes rent or shredded, but also lovingly reassembled into seductive playgrounds for our senses. The act of repair is essential to Gartside's work, which she sees as analogous to the care and maintenance of human relationships. Repurposing fabric as a form of storytelling has been an integral aspect of her creative practice since her teens. As she wrote in 2014, her first exploration of this involved making a box pleat skirt from her bedroom curtains: "In bed I used to let my eye run over the curtain print. Focussing on the repetition of shapes and patterns was calming, and the open blooms hopeful. One day I saw in my mind's eye the answer of how to place this fabric on the body" (Gartside 2014). This reference to the angle of viewing has also proved to be central to the construction of her spatial work.

This exhibition, cut to fit the idiosyncratic Metro Arts gallery space, begins with *Distended Nightie*, the billowing form of an empty sheer slip, ridged and bulging like the bloated throat pleats of a humpback whale. Rather than suggesting the presence of an ideal feminine body, this fantastic creature suggests a body that has willed itself into some other form. From here we encounter the tessellated lace geometry of *New Terrain* (2016), before swinging through the floating strips of pastel nylon that brush against the face as we move through *The Sleepover* (2018). *Full Circle* (2018) hovers gently on the wall, held in place by the small clasp eyes that could once be found in the sewing section signed as 'Notions'. This box which is not one (2016), a hovering lace and tulle suspension, quivers as we walk underneath it, before we encounter *Dissolved nightie in lilac* (2018) – a garment literally absorbed by the wall-hanging it has become. Custom-sewn sheer coverings hang in front of each window, diffusing the light of the city outside.

As children, our lives are largely spent looking either up at the world we will grow into or down to the ground where we once crawled and explored. The standard western museum hang might be designed to avoid these difficult angles of vision and address our adult eyeline, but installation artists regularly exploit the deep memory patterns of the skyward and groundward perspectives that reconnect us to our younger, more synaesthetic bodies. There is a scene in John Boorman's autobiographical WWII movie, *Hope and Glory* (1987) where a young boy is confronted by the unabashed dressing and undressing of adult women during a 'make-do and mend' clothing exchange. From his upward perspective, we get



L to R: *New terrain*, 2016 & *Distended nightie in pink*, 2018

glimpses of underwear, a motif that repeats throughout the film. It is a visual device that conveys the complex pleasures of life turned upside down. As the granddaughter and great-niece of five sisters of that era, I strangely identified with the young protagonist finding delight in difficult times through the *jouissance* of women. Their drawers were full of mysterious undergarments and lacy nylon slippers. As we walk under and around Gartside's work, confronted by its textural recesses and lacy folds, teased by its gently undulating tendrils, we are prompted to revisit our earlier sense memories. Gartside's fabric constructions are designed as fantasy devices for feeling. They guide us to delight, even as our world gives us every reason to feel pain.

by Courtney Pedersen (2018)

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This box which is not one, 2016

Image to left: *Dissolved nightie in lilac, 2018*
Overleaf: *The sleepover, 2018*







Form, like body, should never be assumed

To demonstrate care of ownership
the stained nightie is bathed
& then rolled between 2 towels
to press out excess moisture
before the evaporation reasons
a reshaping. Re-dried & re-domesticated—
When does material not matter
in acts of plunging & tautness?
There is constant weight to malleability,
even when synthetic—the way rumours
may knot like a nightie & can be held
against a body for an arousal
of contempt. A nightie's length
in comparison to a shoulder strap
is designed to be longer than a throat—
yet unlike a throat, a nightie cannot
be as deeply penetrated—assuming
there is a throat for the gown to tenderly
stroke over—as opposed to being lifted
from the ground, up past the feet—
supposing there are feet & a ground.

by Autumn Royal (2018)



L to R: *New terrain*, 2016 & *Window Coverings*, 2018

Image to Right: *New terrain*, 2016





Distended nightie in pink, 2018

List of Works

1 *Distended nightie in pink*, 2018, found nightie and synthetic fabric, milliner's wire, thread. 69 x 44 x 53 cm

2 *New terrain*, 2016, found petticoat lace trim, tulle fabric, found garter-belt clips, thread. 360 x 161 x 264 cm

3-7 *Window coverings*, 2018, silk fabric, thread, size (with assistance from Melanie Ward).

8 *Dissolved nightie in lilac*, 2018, silk fabric, gifted nightie (from Louise), thread. 66 x 220 x 6 cm

9 *This box which is not one*, 2016, gifted cotton lace fabric (from Ray and Susanne), tulle fabric, thread. 427 x 316 x 210 cm

10 *The sleepover*, 2018, found slips and nighties, found synthetic fabric and cotton ribbon, milliner's wire, thread, size (with assistance from Melanie Ward, Monika Holgar and Kate Woodcroft). 670 x 280 x 210 cm.

You are welcome to gently touch and walk through this sculpture.

11 *Full circle*, 2018, offcuts of found slips and nighties, eyes from hook & eye fastenings, thread. 2 cm (depth) x 80 cm (diameter)

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Full circle, 2018

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