

HANNAH GARTSIDE

FANTASIES

20 JULY - 20 OCTOBER 2019



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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 a “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 the Documenta 14 and Venice Biennale exhibitions of 2017, fabric and thread were ubiquitous. Sheila Hicks’ *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. *Fantasies* sits firmly within this lineage.

Gartside cites the influence of a diverse range of artists on her work, including Sarah Lucas, Rebecca Horn and Lara Favaretto, 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.



Above and page 1:

Hannah GARTSIDE b 1987 London, England

The Sleepover 2018

Found slips and nighties, found synthetic fabric and cotton ribbon, milliner’s wire, thread, size (with assistance from Melanie Ward, Monka Holgar and Kate Woodcroft.

670 x 280 x 210 cm Photography: Louis Lim

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 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 slips. 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.



Hannah GARTSIDE

b 1987 London, England

Full Circle 2018

Fabric off-cuts of found slips and nighties, thread, metal eye fastenings. Collection of the artist

2 cm (depth) x 80 cm (diameter).

Photograph: Louis Lim

Dr Courtney Pedersen

This is an abridged version of the original essay commissioned for Fantasies, Metro Arts, Brisbane (2018), which can be found at www.hannahgartside.com/texts

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HANNAH GARTSIDE BIOGRAPHY

Hannah Gartside received a Bachelor of Fine Art (Sculpture) from Victorian College of the Arts in 2016. Her graduate exhibition was awarded an NGV Women's Association Prize. She has held solo exhibitions at Metro Arts Gallery (QLD), and George Paton Gallery (VIC), and has participated in group exhibitions at QUT Art Museum, Kings ARI, Blindsight, Craft Victoria, Yarra Sculpture Gallery, Museum of Brisbane, The Johnston Collection Art Museum, and McClelland Gallery and Sculpture Park.

In 2017, Gartside undertook a two-month Varda Artist Residency (living and working on a houseboat in Sausalito, California), and

was a finalist in Hatched (Perth Institute of Contemporary Art), Fresh (Craft Victoria) and the Fischer's Ghost Art Awards (Campbelltown Arts Centre). In 2019 and 2017 she was a finalist in the Wangaratta Contemporary Textile Award.

Prior to her visual art training, Gartside received a BFA in Fashion Design from Queensland University of Technology, and worked as a costume-maker and backstage dresser for five years, mainly for classical ballet. Her work is held in the Wangaratta Art Gallery collection, and in private collections across Australia.

Nightgown slips

Silk submerges in a silver tub of tepid water
foamy with [gentle] liquid detergent –
after four minutes of light agitation
shaped by human contact,
now is the time for soaking examination –
why must a gown either creep or caress
& not slip into both – the way language
immeasurably clings even when whispered
or delicately cuts – as if authenticity
is assumed by a volume of expression –
yet sincerity [like wit] is often unseen
& unable to be ripped from the wearing –
no matter the differing material, the nylon
nightie soaking amongst the silk gowns
will also be shaped with a gaze – as [promised]
by its own company branding – rhapsody –

Autumn Royal

2018



Right: "Diamond Cut"
original nightgown tag circa
1975 from the nighties
used in *Ascension I (Angels)*,
2018-2019.



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