

Wear and tear

Hannah Gartside and Autumn Royal

Fantasies (pictured at right, courtesy of the artist) was an intimate installation in which visual artist Hannah Gartside explored the 'nightgown' in collaboration with poet Autumn Royal. *Fantasies* exhibited at Metro Arts in 2018.

Autumn Royal: With hope, my poetry attempts to respond to what may be seen, whether this be directly or indirectly. Collaborating with Hannah allows me to understand how poetry may deepen friendships and generate alternative forms of expression. Hannah and I first connected at a mutual friend's birthday. We bonded over the clichéd – yet colossal topics – of loss, love, frustrations and rejuvenation. Our initial connection literally stitched us together!

Hannah Gartside: I was nervously settling in to Narm/Melbourne, from Meanjin/Brisbane, when I met Autumn. She felt like a person who also had the same commitment to art that resonated with me. What drew me most to Autumn's writing is her ability to tie together physical actions and material objects to the immaterial felt/somatic experiences. This is exactly what *Fantasies* is about to me.

AR: Most of the fabric Hannah interacted with for *Fantasies* was mass-produced polyester, which is still today considered to be an inferior material compared to silk. (If I were a material, I'd definitely be polyester.) When I visited Hannah's studio, she sincerely insisted on me feeling all of the fabrics she'd been working with and affectionately explained how each piece of material she touched had a particular sensation.

HG: I knew months before the exhibition call-out period that I was going to apply to show *Fantasies* at Metro Arts. I felt it was a gallery that could enhance and pull resonances from my work through the spatial layout of wall partitions and windows, the quality of the natural light, and the wear and tear of the space itself. (I even had an essential oil diffuser hidden underneath the floorboards, which Bella Teggins [administration coordinator] refilled and turned on for me each day of the exhibition. I think we used ylang-ylang.)

AR: After Hannah learnt her *Fantasies* was to become a reality, she phoned to ask if I'd write poetry responding to her work. The 'nightie' is associated with a femininity that's assumed fallible, yet as Hannah's work demonstrates – and as my poetry hopes to illuminate – it's actually a formidable piece of clothing. *Fantasies* was an exploration of the powers of the feminine as well as opening up spaces for queer desires within the binaristic restrictions placed on expressions of pleasure, love and sexuality.

HG: *Fantasies* was my first solo exhibition after graduating from art school; I gained such confidence in affecting and manipulating physical space from this show. 'Dissolved nightie in lilac' was later acquired by Wangaratta Art Gallery for their public collection, and 'New Terrain' and 'The Sleepover' went on to form the basis of the second iteration of *Fantasies*, at Ararat Gallery TAMA in 2019. And, to date, Autumn has written poems [including 'Nightgown slips', right] for each of my solo exhibitions – a collaboration that we hope continues indefinitely.

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 –

