

Hannah Gartside

Each of Hannah Gartside's kinetic sculptures is named after a remarkable woman: the Tarot card illustrator Pamela 'Pixie' Colman Smith (1878–1951), the painter Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–c. 1654), the dancer Loïe Fuller (1862–1928), the actress Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923), and the Biblical ur-woman Lilith.

Gartside came to sculpture through clothes making, first in fashion then in costume at the Queensland Ballet. She uses deadstock fabric, clothes found in skips and op shops or given to her by friends, garments of dead relatives and fur from pets. For the artist, clothes are psychic objects that not only have history (a faded menstrual stain, the scent of a beloved) but presence; material has its own life. We talk about the 'body' of fabric, the way it behaves; unlike the modernist grid, the warp and weft of fabric is flexible, sensitive: its strength lies in its 'give', its allowance. In this sense, the sculptures are about fabric itself, the singular way in which material is able to articulate the immaterial – a current of air, an undertow of desire. Fabric also has its own sound world and Gartside is listening to what it is saying, 'pulsing, sighing, calling to us.'¹

Lilith, made from a 1930s grosgrain silk moiré party dress, is cut in a single, continuous spiral like an orange peel, a giant unwound skirt that flutters in its own rhythm. *Sarah* is made from a silk satin 1990s disco dress and a carefully slashed black satin 1890s mourning dress, edged with renegade tassels like enormous eyelashes or exclamation marks. The red velvet rouleau ropes of *Artemisia* swing with the momentum of their weight: at the trial of her rapist, Gentileschi was tortured with a technique called *sibille*, in which ropes were threaded through and tightened around her fingers. In *Pixie*, a green satin

¹ Hannah Gartside, *Artist Statement*, unpublished, 2021

*HAN - forgive these notes, I was on the phone to my psych when I did this.

My work has matured, ~~and become~~ I write to introduce myself... it's hard to fit in with the galaxy

Madhamic angel dutiful.

complete something based clear.

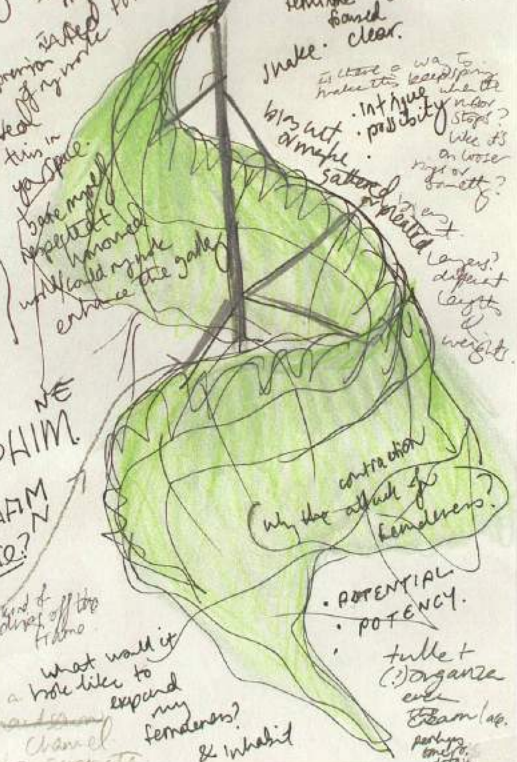
shake. clear.

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haven't read about wings yet one.

this is my relationship to these in career.



SERAPHIM

SERAPHIM

MOND?

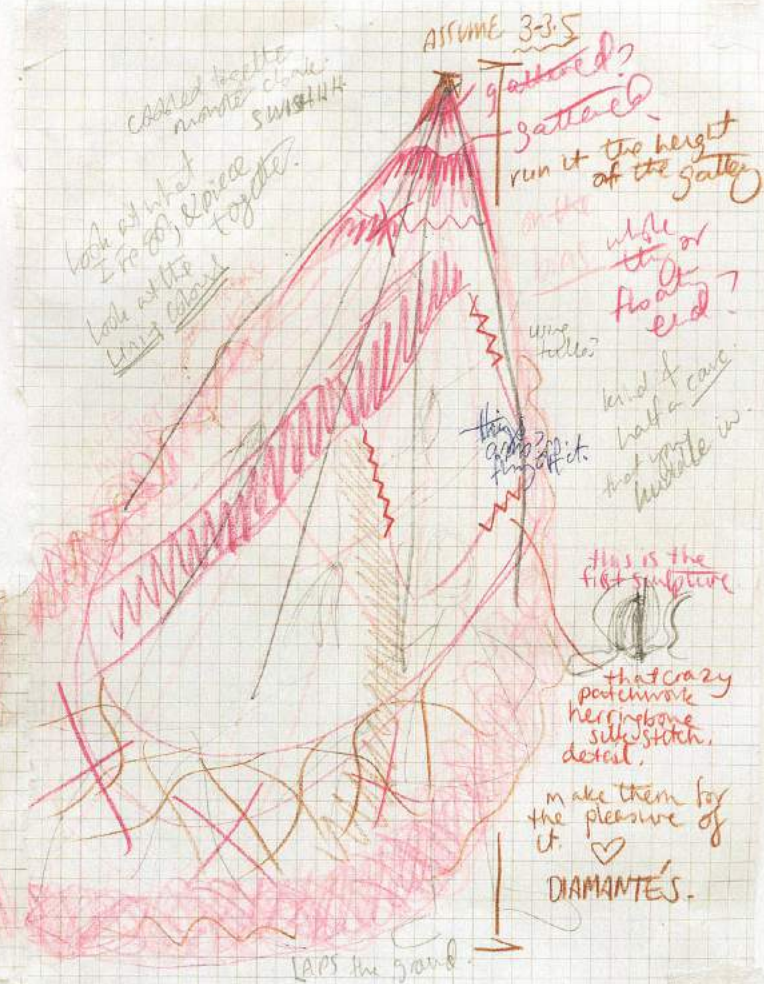
is it up into?

it kind of drift off the frame

could the screen be... the future could be super etc

or, it's a hole like to expand my tenderness?

channel



glove irritates the floor with one finger, pushing a point. Each sculpture behaves in its own way, and sometimes contradictorily so: the godets at the hem of *Loïe*, a silk crêpe wraith that swoops from the height of the gallery, flute in an independent ripple, while the tiny glass bead details tap against the fabric like light rain.

Gartside's phantom dancers are animated by the spirits of their namesakes, 'women who have felt deeply alive, wild and wrathful, lusty, autonomous.'² The gyre of the sculptures creates a force-field of resistance but also a centre of gravity, a way of commanding space, of marking out an arena of self-possession. Are they turning inwards or outwards, in fury or delight? 'It's as if the clothes are sick of being blamed – "What was she wearing?" – they fight back,' says the artist; a flinging off of the mud that sticks, a fuck you fuck you fuck you with every revolution.³ And yet they are gentle, creating an enclosure for tenderness within their billows. Freedom of subjectivity must be fought for: the artist asks, why must this be so? Underscored by a mechanical whir of anxiety, Gartside's fantastic characters swish and rustle, larger-than-life, dancing to their own whispered tune.

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