



Re-fab

Sally Blake, Mog Bremner, Meredith Hughes, Monique van Nieuwland, Carly Prowse, Julie Ryder

Craft ACT in partnership with Belconnen Gallery

Re-fab is an exhibition of rehabilitated pre-loved cloth. Discarded and worn out textiles, including clothing, furnishing fabrics and homewares, have been revamped and re-valued by six artists: Sally Blake, Mog Bremner, Meredith Hughes, Monique van Nieuwland, Carly Prowse and Julie Ryder.

Dribble, by Monique van Nieuwland, presents us with three recreated cloths, a dribble cloth, bib and serviette, each originally designed for catching wayward human saliva at different stages of our lives. Van Nieuwland's process of reconstruction is a labour of love. It begins with unravelling each textile and ends with the threads having been re-woven into a new cloth, almost identical in shape, size and detail, yet held within a much larger weaving of transparent thread. *Dribble* is the latest in van Nieuwland's explorative body of work, which re-contextualises mundane textiles and elevates them to the status of art objects. Her conscious and astute choice to re-use highlights not only the beauty, but also the longevity inherent in the weave structures and fibres used in woven cotton textiles that are rapidly being replaced with synthetic, non-recyclable and one-use-only disposable goods.

Sally Blake has reconfigured an easily identifiable and richly symbolic item of clothing. The denim jean bears an inescapable status as an icon of popular culture, globalised mass-production and the exporting of the United States of America to a global market. However, Blake's installation, *same same, but different II*, subverts these associations. Discarded denim jeans have been moulded and shaped to create a large number of small forms resembling birds' nests, termite mounds and insect cocoons. The tender and caring shelters draw on denims practical roots as a hard wearing and protective fabric. Blake's imitation of these creatures' instinct to

create shelter from all manner of found materials alludes to the environmental impact of waste on their habitats.

The Garden, by Meredith Hughes sources blue floral patterns from a variety of textiles including discarded industry test prints and second-hand furnishing fabrics. Hughes dismantles the repeat patterns with the time consuming, yet meditative process of cutting around the shapes of individual flowers. Her work then grows slowly as a unique installation offering us a new language with which to question our complacency about the material and natural worlds, and to ponder something greater than the gallery space and ourselves.

Julie Ryder reconstructs fragments from the silk linings of old Kimono. These fragments are stained with plant dye before being delicately yet visibly stitched together. Her stitches mimic and celebrate the hand mending she finds amongst original Kimono pieces. Citrus fruits are then placed across the cloth transforming the silk through fermentation. Ryder's most recent work is an ongoing series in which she explores natural forces combined with her sense of design. Ryder's decision to re-use in this context is based on the Japanese principle of wabi-sabi, which focuses on the beauty of the unconventional, imperfect, impermanent and incomplete.

The Owls: Episode One 'Shy owl seeks love - singles only' by Carly Prowse is a short animation that tells the tale of new love between two collaged owls. The owls and their surroundings have been created from scraps of furnishing fabrics, old clothes and miscellaneous second hand cloth. The animation is the first collaboration between Prowse, a Melbourne based textile artist, and emerging filmmaker Andrew Altree-Williams. Their joint venture is an energetic and deliciously quirky concoction of narrative, collage, the

bizarre and the fantastic, exploring the possibilities of limited resources.

In *Business/Busyness*, Mog Bremner has transformed five of her husband's old business shirts into two hand woven tapestries. The imagery in each tapestry is based on advertisements she found in her mother's 1940s cookery books. On the one hand, her work is a response to an abundance of old shirts as the new constantly replaces the not so new. Then on the other hand, her weavings are laden with ideas belonging to a previous generation's perceptions of gender roles, highlighted by Bremner's pun on the word busy. *Business/Busyness* adds a contemporary spin to the tradition of weaving rag rugs and poignantly captures the difference in today's impetus to re-use as opposed to that of previous generations.

The works in **Re-fab** exhibit a broad range of techniques and new ideas applied to recycled fabrics. In unique ways these works ask us to consider the original purposes of the textiles, the evidence of previous lives and pertinent sustainability issues.

Mim Kelly
 Craft ACT Curatorial Intern
 April 2008



Image credits: (front) **Carly Prowse**, *The Owl Walks* (animation still), 2007, recycled textiles. (this side left to right, top to bottom) **Sally Blake**, *same same, but different II*, 2007, denim jeans, cotton thread; **Monique van Nieuwland**, *K* (detail), hand weaving, discontinued supplementary weft, embroidery monofilament, unravelled cotton serviette, tussah silk, cotton; **Meredith Hughes**, *offering*, 2008, deconstructed floral fabrics; **Julie Ryder**, *chiaroscuro*, 2007, silk Kimono linings, silk thread; **Mog Bremner**, *Business/Busyness*, 2007/8, business shirts, cotton warp. All photos: courtesy of the artists.

Belconnen Gallery

Cnr Chandler St & Swanson Crt, Belconnen
 GALLERY HOURS 9am - 5pm Mon - Fri



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