

Exhibition review: Crafting Anatomies

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Exhibition Review

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Crafting Anatomies: Bonington Gallery, Nottingham Trent University, UK,
7th January – 4th February 2015

Crafting Anatomies is the final exhibition in a series of shows and events celebrating 170 years of art and design education in Nottingham. Curated by Amanda Briggs-Goode, Rhian Solomon and Katherine Townsend, the exhibition call resulted in 170 responses from the UK, Germany and USA, from which the selection panel composed of fine artist Kashif Nadim Chaudry, footwear concept designer Liz Ciokajlo, and Deborah Dean, the exhibitions manager at Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery, chose 47 designers, clinicians and artists to exhibit their work alongside artifacts from the historical collection of Nottingham City Museum and films from The Wellcome Trust Archive. The exhibits are grouped under the themes of Material, Performance and Identity and bring together personal narratives and collaborative dialogues to offer a complex, and varied response to human anatomy. The exhibition includes a wide range of artifacts from luxury items such as Lee Mattocks' surrealist red handbag, to the bespoke ocular prosthetics of John Pacey-Lowrie, a

series of photographs by Karen Ingham which use medical imaging processes to expand the genre of self-portraiture and the customized implants devised by Julian Ellis for use in surgical reconstruction. However, this review will focus on the work of a group of exhibitors who are using technologies to expand the potential of traditional ways of making with textiles, and applications for enhanced wellbeing.

Figures 1 & 2 Hannah White

Hannah White's work is characterized by a focus on re-interpreting and reviving handcrafted textile processes via the use of new materials, technologies and modes of manufacturing. Her work consists of a light reflective laser cut lace collar which is part of a series of lace based forms intended to be applied as a reflective design to women's sportswear. By providing safety at night the reflective trims become both functional and decorative. When worn by cyclists or runners at night the applied reflective elements appear to dance in the darkness and create intangible patterns of light that are captured in the still photographs presented alongside the sample reflective collar. The title of the work 'Lace Tracks' (www.lacetracks.com) comes from associations with the light trails generated from the movement of the body and the alliteration with the word racetracks, which have connections to running and cycling tracks. The exhibits bring a contemporary application of lace pattern and format

to life, challenging perceptions that it is outdated and static. They also offer a contemporary counterpoint to the early 19th century lace runners who spent their days working in dismal surroundings laboring intensively for hours to produce a singular item of distinctive beauty for a wealthy patron, and also to the ideology of the Arts and Crafts Movement which 'sentimentalised hand embroidery for its evocation of home, hearth and heart' (Parker 2013:178).

Maker Rhian Solomon and pattern cutting expert Juliana Sissons, have been working together as part of the sKINship project (www.sKINship.co.uk), which Solomon established in 2012 in response to a commission by the Wellcome Trust to investigate the similarities between skin and cloth, and the body and dress. Solomon's research interests focus on collaborations between pattern cutting for body related disciplines and reconstructive plastic surgery specialisms, whilst her visual arts practice draws parallels between skin and cloth in relation to the body. sKINship has supported the growth of a UK based network of medical practitioners and artist makers aimed at informing new practices in the design and planning of surgical procedures through the consideration of elements of commonality between these professions. In 2014 Solomon and Sissons collaborated with Sarah Pape, a consultant plastic surgeon specializing in burns and laser surgery, who is also a maker working with knit, stitch, spinning and crochet, to create 3 jersey

toiles which are draped onto quarter scale mannequins, entitled 'Surgical cutting for fashion'. These works explore the application of surgical cutting procedures to fashion design, and grew out of initial enquiries into the form of post-operative cosmetic surgery garments with particular reference to the social and psychological implications of this type of surgery. Sissons and Pape have pursued the correspondence between knit and skin, especially the capacity for multi directional stretch and the manipulation of grain through cross-grain cutting and shaping, extrapolating upon the rules of plastic surgery, as established by Sir Harold Gillies, who in 1955, at the 1st International Conference of Plastic Surgery, declared

'within us all there is an overwhelming urge to change something ugly and useless into some other thing more beautiful and more functional.'

Their ongoing conversations through cutting and making have resulted in artifacts and working models that explore the relationship in both surgery and tailoring of exposing and concealing, in order to display or dissemble, and the need for greater forward and reverse planning of clinical procedures prior to surgery, on and onto paper. This echoes Gillies' work in making pictorial records of pre- and post-facial reconstruction cases, initially undertaken by himself, but later in collaboration with the artist Henry Tonks, in order to produce a visual history of World War I injuries to the face sustained during action (Summers & Brown 2014:2), and also

the work of Alexis Carrel who in the early 1900's developed new ways of suturing blood vessels based on the technique of triangulation, which was informed by sewing lessons he took from an embroiderer.

Lois Pitman presents a set of delicate seamless knitted gloves made from milk fiber biopolymers that ease symptoms of pain and inflammation in the hands of those suffering from rheumatoid arthritis. The exhibits emerged from an ongoing research project, which addresses the sustainable practice challenges posed by the use of renewable fibers to contemporary fashion health and wellbeing products. Pitman worked with a group of arthritis sufferers to test the gloves, which are made from PLA and to rate them in terms of comfort, design and visual appeal, and wellbeing. She is in the process of applying the knowledge gained from this project to the development of seamless whole garments knitting technologies using renewable fibers to enable a holistic approach to longevity and user satisfaction and comfort.

Figures 3 & 4 Ania Sadkowska

'the body mediates meaning, is mediated by meaning, and is thus our opening to meaningful being' (Morris 2008:114). Ania Sadkowska presents work undertaken as part of her ongoing PhD research entitled: **Fashioning Age: A phenomenological exploration of ageing'**. Sadkowska uses jackets as a vehicle for exploring the individual lived experience of British men. The jackets are extended and altered to offer metaphors for

perceptions of past and present bodily masculine discomfort that emerged from a series of interviews that she undertook with middle aged men in their own homes. Building on the analysis of these interviews Sadkowska modified and altered a set of second-hand men's jackets, relating them to the themes which emerged from the discussions with men about their perceptions of fashion which included mirroring, discomfort, peacocking and pioneering. The jackets explore issues of communication and mediation between self and society, and are intended to offer insights into the complex and individually unique process of ageing on the construction of male identity.

Fo Hamblin made her large-scale textile installation 'The Choreography of Making' 2014, in collaboration with photographer Richard Foot and artist Arron Fowler (www.racollaborations.co.uk). Hamblin works with film, and in collaboration with film makers, to explore the performative aspects of constructed textiles and embodied gestures of making, but this is the first time that she has projected film onto an installation. In the past she has worked with dancers to examine how materials can move with, and in resistance to, the body, however in her more recent practice Hamblin has focused on the making process itself rather than the body. The installation was constructed through a laborious and repetitive use of stretched and pinned threads, a process which involved Hamblin and an assistant in undertaking carefully choreographed whole body movements, as opposed to hand or finger interactions, in order to create a circular

connective space which both describes and dissects the space of making, resulting in a fine webbed structure. The physical exhibit is offered as the end result of a process, which traces the creation of a specific and articulated space. It subsequently releases and reforms into a positive artifact, which is able to contain space whilst holding the residues of its own history, such as traces of the makers skin on the threads, and the rituals of its making. The work makes visible the processes of making through collaboration in order to reveal how the makers harness their physicality, to enable them to think in making by drawing upon

‘available patterns of marking that silently/invisibly inhabit the unmarked as an insistent possibility’ (Peters 2013: 110).

In ‘Heart of the Matter’ Alexa Wright explores the relationship of mind and body, and the effect that heart transplantation can have on an individual, through an installation consisting of a set of 6 jackets displayed on the wall, each of which contains a small speaker through which an individual’s spoken narrative reflection on their heart transplant can be heard. The uniformity of the simple and rather bland jacket forms act to accentuate the vividness of the individual’s experience of a transformation of their pre-personal bodily engagement with subjectivity.

Figures 5 & 6 Shelley Goldsmith

“it would emerge in the interactions between them, made possible by the way human beings always already *are* bodily and material things themselves, as well as by an acceptance of not knowing that allows human intelligence *about* matter to be coupled with the guiding intelligence *of* matter” (Jones 2013: 28). These interrelationships are explored in Shelley Goldsmith’s two exhibits ‘Mothers Touch’ and ‘Ohio Locus’, which take the form of a glove and a dress presented together on a table. A dye sublimation process was used to imprint and layer images onto both garments. The dress is partially reconfigured to reveal both the inside and outside of the garment. Goldsmith positions her practice at the cusp of crafts and fine art and uses textiles to evoke and re-imagine states of human existence, in particular the narratives of fragility and loss that can be revealed through the stains and marks in clothing, that hold the residues and physical and emotional resonances of the wearers. The works expand upon the idea that every contact leaves a trace that is indelible, and that the imprints of our lives can be read in the skins that clothing forms around our bodies. The use of liquid dye absorbed into fabric parallels the absorption of our lives into the textiles that we use to re-present, conceal and protect our bodies. Goldsmith is developing the ‘Stains and Stories’ series in conjunction with clinical psychologist Dr. Herminia Hernaiz-Sanders through an Arts Council funded project exploring the ‘locus of control’ theory through drawing on clothes.

An ambitious show, including a wide range of practices from conceptual

art to clinical practice through making, *Crafting Anatomies* presents a series of narratives around science and art, and making and the body. The strongest work in the show offers new ways of thinking about, and undertaking making, related to our capacity to voice and represent the complexity of our bodily experience. It is interesting to note the developing overlap between the philosophical referencing of practice in fine art, making and design. However, an overuse of philosophical languages can result in the assertion of meanings that would be more appropriately grounded in research in, and through, practices which aim for the purposeful application of knowledge gained by making. Where exhibits were underpinned by thorough research and clarity of purpose or application, they achieved a greater potential for longevity of involvement by both viewers and users, whilst still challenging the boundaries of discipline practice and embracing interdisciplinary participation. By bringing together established designers and makers with researchers and clinicians, the exhibition offers an opportunity to scope contemporary emergent interdisciplinary practices that may come to make significant contributions to the development of various fields, and to new intersections between the making of novel objects for contemplation and application.

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