



# SLIPSTITCH

Curated by Dr Belinda von Mengersen

**LEARNING GUIDE**

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**COVER IMAGE:**

*The Universe Quilt* (detail) 2013

Cotton thread on laminated cotton cloth

Stitch: straight stitch, seed stitch, satin stitch,

French knots

200cm x 175cm (variable)

Ararat Regional Art Gallery Collection

Image courtesy of Andrew Curtis (photographer)

## About this Learning Guide

This learning guide is intended for use as a starting point to generate discussion and activities before, during and after a visit to *Slipstitch*. It is designed to be used in conjunction with information provided in the exhibition catalogue, gallery wall texts and on the NETS Victoria website. This resource includes an extended introduction to the project with some information about the curator, Dr. Belinda von Mengersen, and the curatorial themes of the exhibition. The introduction is intended to provide points of departure for further discussion and research, before and after your visit to *Slipstitch*. The introduction is followed by sections for eight selected individual artists.

The sections in this document about individual artists include some biographical information, direct you to relevant examples of previous works by the artist, and where possible provide links to articles that would be suitable as reference for commentaries relevant to the VCE Art curriculum.

### Planning your visit

Before visiting *Slipstitch* it is suggested that you contact gallery staff to determine the following.

- Opening hours, transport and parking options, cloakroom facilities and admission fees
- Suitability of content for the year level you intend to bring
- Staff availability for introductory talks and tours
- Education and Public Programs, artist talks etc. that coincide with the exhibition

Before your visit you may wish to discuss the following with your students

- Various issues covered in the introduction of this guide
- Your expectations for appropriate behaviour at a gallery, in regards to the safety of both students and artworks, and given that a gallery is a public space

### Curriculum links and themes

*Slipstitch* is relevant to many of the five Art subjects identified in the Australian Curriculum: directly to Visual Art in the areas of textiles, visual communication, design and technology and Media Art, and also indirectly it may provide starting points for ideas that can be explored through Drama, Dance and Music.

*Slipstitch* provides an ideal starting point from which to explore cross-curricula projects, fostering collaboration between teachers and students, across the areas of **mathematics, ecology, ethics and philosophy**. The linear nature of embroidery creates its own kind of 'script', and its' relationship with narratives such as 'The Bayeux Tapestry' make *Slipstitch* also a good link with creative writing (see especially references in Ilka White's work to the writing of Gagudju man Bill Neidjie).

This document is broadly aimed at students from years 4 through to 10 and VCE Units 1-4, however the material may be easily tailored to suit younger students. The material is organised according to the new Australian Curriculum for the Arts.

Throughout the text, artists, groups and organisations are highlighted in blue to suggest starting points for further research.

## General Capabilities

Engagement with *Slipstitch* provides students with opportunities to address the following general capabilities:

- Literacy
- Information and communication technology capability
- Critical and creative thinking
- Personal and social capability
- Intercultural understanding

## VCE Art/Studio Art

- Artist's practice, ideas and inspiration
- Responding to Artworks: formal analysis, analytical frameworks and interpreting meanings and messages
- Exploring artists personal and cultural perspectives
- Exploring symbols and metaphors expressed in artworks
- Exploring possibilities for materials, processes and techniques
- Methods and consideration involved in the exhibition design

## Career pathways in the art industry

- Throughout this resource there are examples of study pathways and professional experience that can be instructive in developing ideas for career pathways for students in a variety of disciplines



## Slipstitch - Introduction

Use this section to provide points of departure for discussion and research, before and after your visit to *Slipstitch*.

### The Curator

Dr. Belinda von Mengersen was born in Mildura in 1974 and she currently lives and works in Sydney. She combines her own art practice with curating textile-focused exhibitions and lecturing in textiles at The National School of Arts, The Australian Catholic University, and the Faculty of Arts at the University of Technology, Sydney. Belinda completed a Bachelor of Creative Arts, at University of Wollongong, with a double major in Visual Arts (Textiles) and Theatre Design. Of this course she says, “My first degree was very exciting – a truly cross-disciplinary degree when most uni’s at that time were just doing lip-service to the term.”<sup>1</sup> She holds a PhD in contemporary embroidery and its’ relationship to drawing, and a Post Graduate Diploma in Fine Art Textiles from Goldsmiths College in London.

### Early influences

In the *Slipstitch* catalogue Belinda says that she “cannot remember a time when she was not stitching”. She traces her passion for textiles and embroidery back through the generations of women in her family – her mother, grandmothers, aunt, great-aunt, and great-grandmother.<sup>2</sup> When she was nine years old she was lucky enough to work alongside her paternal grandmother, Dorothy Waide, who was the first female counsellor in Griffith, New South Wales. The project, developed by Waide, was called *The Scenic Curtain*, and involved many members of the Griffith community, and surrounding regional communities in the making of a large embroidered curtain for the Griffith City Regional Theatre. Visual artists and crafts practitioners were involved, and communities from a broad range of multicultural backgrounds. The project brought participants, mostly women, together in a workshop environment where they might otherwise have been more isolated. The images on the curtain were intended to reflect the local landscape and agricultural heritage of the area. Each group worked on sections of the curtain, and finally they were all combined to dramatic effect. Belinda remembers how exciting it was to watch a group project realised on this large scale and how she helped to bring the panels together, adjusting them from atop a ladder. She was inspired by the richness and diversity of colours, material and techniques incorporated in to the final work. Here’s a link to view *The Scenic Curtain*: [http://www.griffith.nsw.gov.au/cp\\_themes/theatre/page.asp?p=DOC-QVB-14-08-70](http://www.griffith.nsw.gov.au/cp_themes/theatre/page.asp?p=DOC-QVB-14-08-70)

*Both my grandmothers made their own unique work at home and taught many others in their community (including within some local schools) a whole range of textile and pottery techniques. Growing up I thought that making things was very normal and saw through the role models in my family just how a practice of making could be interwoven within your life on a daily basis. In retrospect I also think that it was instilled in me that this was a privilege and should be shared with others through teaching. I have always thought of teaching as a way to give back to the community and hopefully inspire others to find a way of working that suits them.* Dr. Belinda von Mengersen

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Belinda von Mengersen, 27/4/15

<sup>2</sup> Belinda von Mengersen, *Slipstitch* catalogue, NETS Victoria and Ararat Regional Gallery, 2015

In a recent interview Belinda reflected on how she manages her working life across numerous projects, creating her own work and teaching. “For me it is most interesting how the different aspects of my work can cross-pollinate and influence each other. I find that the work as a curator and an artist challenges me; I need to take risks with that work in terms of my thinking, and that new research and experimentation feeds back into my teaching. I am very passionate about my work – its inherent diversity keeps me inspired. The moments I find most inspiring are when I am working in one field and something random pops up and all of a sudden the answer to a problem I have in another field is clear – that’s what I mean by cross-pollination. Yes, it is busy, but each aspect of my work, no matter how seemingly diverse injects the other. I try to find pockets of space for each type of work and pay very close attention to that particular task. I write a lot of lists. I have short-term goals and longer term goals. I feel very privileged to be working in a field that I am so inspired by and that my life and my work are inextricably linked. [Slipstitch] has been very engaging to work on with the other artists – I feel like I had an understanding of some aspects of their work because I do embroidery myself in my own practice and yet I had other historical and theoretical ideas to bring to work too. I would like to think that this show may inspire both current and future generations to pick up a needle and stitch, just because they would like to try it, to see what it may offer them. In some cases it may be a way they can communicate something of their own journey, their own story.”

Belinda recently contributed to the journal craft + design enquiry. This journal, published by the Australian National University, investigates the contribution that contemporary craft and design makes to society, establishing a dialogue between craft and design practice and cultural, social and environmental concerns. Here’s a link to the journal:

<http://press.anu.edu.au/titles/craftdesign-enquiry/issue-6-2014/>

## Slipstitch Themes

### Cross-fertilization between England and Australia

*Slipstitch* draws a number of links between the practice of embroidery in England and in Australia. *Slipstitch* Curator Dr. Belinda von Mengersen received a Rotary International Ambassadorial Scholarship, with which she was able to study textiles at Goldsmiths College in London; artist Sera Waters studied at The Royal School of Needlework at Hampton Court Palace; artists David Green and Tim Moore were originally from the United Kingdom, and Alice Kettle is a resident of the UK, teaching at Manchester Metropolitan University.

The Department of Embroidery at Goldsmiths was established by **Constance Howard** (1910-2000) after she began working there as a lecturer in 1947. Howard broke new ground in textile theory, with her proposition that embroidery was an experimental visual arts practice on an equal footing with painting and drawing. Her work was figurative and graphic, and she studied the history of embroidery, as well as developing new theories about approaches to colour, freedom of expression and working from observation.

Of her time at Goldsmiths von Mengersen states: “This international experience was wonderful because I had an exposure to textile theory through a series of seminars where international artists like **Narelle Jubelin** were invited to present, and at the same time work with ancient and rare embroidery machines and cutting edge digital technology.”

**Janis Jefferies**, an English artist and academic was teaching at Goldsmiths when Belinda was studying there, and continues to provide inspiration and mentorship for her. Jefferies has taught in America, Canada and Australia. She encourages her students to explore inter-disciplinary ways of working and experiment with creative writing. Her theories consider how textiles function in society and draw a fascinating connection between textile practice and digital technology:

*Making in the physical world implies unmaking, remaking, making new connections across people and place, the physical and the virtual. Through the manipulation of textile materials, processes, methods, histories, technologies, new knowledges are produced; this is an area of creative and critical risk and even more so in the*

digital revolution. So, one argument runs along these lines: that the resurgence in textiles is simultaneous with a global growth in electronic communications. While this conjunction with physical practices in the age of electronic computing may appear to be somewhat paradoxical, technology has provided a different network of social relations and distribution. As such, textiles as one of the oldest and newest technologies around, takes us though a web, a journey back to the future.<sup>3</sup>  
Janis Jefferies

### Collaboration with Anthony Camm and the Ararat Regional Gallery

*Slipstitch* represents a collaboration between the Curator, Dr. Belinda von Mengersen, and Ararat Regional Art Gallery, which is well known, nationally and internationally, for its significant collection of fibre art and textiles. Ararat Regional Gallery opened in 1968 and now has a permanent collection of around twelve hundred works from the 1970s, 80s and 90s, up to more contemporary acquisitions. Here is a link to a video of director Anthony Camm, speaking about the history of the collection:  
<http://www.cv.vic.gov.au/stories/creative-life/textiles-and-fibre-art/textiles-fibre-art-ararat-regional-art-gallery/>

Anthony Camm and Dr. Belinda von Mengersen met at the Tamworth Textile Triennial. Camm expressed an interest in von Mengersen's practice, and a few months later she visited the gallery to see a retrospective of the work of **John Corbett**, a ground-breaking fibre artist active since the 1970s. Camm has been proactive in showcasing lesser-known textile-based arts practitioners including men who have made important contributions to Australia's visual arts heritage.<sup>4</sup> The exhibition "*Making Time: The Art of John Corbett*" celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Ararat Regional Gallery. Camm and von Mengersen shared a common interest in embroidery, this being the subject of von Mengersen's PhD thesis, and they decided to work together to create *Slipstitch*.

### Figuration in embroidery

Figuration, representations of the human body, is an important curatorial focus in this exhibition. Images of the human body create instant recognition in the viewer, and form a very direct means of story-telling – creating narratives that are both intensely personal, and at the same time speak to broad range of people. The curators noticed a trend towards narrative and figurative work amongst contemporary practitioners, and they wanted to explore that theme in their selection of works. The act of making embroidery has a specific physical quality that is intimate, often small-scale and occurs over hours of making, the image appearing slowly – giving the artist the opportunity to reflect on and look closely into their subject material. There is a special relationship between the image and the hand, that is different, yet related to the process of drawing. It is slowed-down process of drawing, many of the artists describing observation as one of their key tools. Embroidery allows for a free-form approach to pattern, and can potentially defy the traditional conventions of textile practice, with a strong focus on individual expression rather than conventional techniques. For other examples of contemporary artists working with embroidery and figuration, explore the work of Japanese artist **Zon Ito** and Egyptian artist **Ghada Amer**.

Probably the most famous example of figurative embroidery in European history is the **Bayeux Tapestry**, probably created in the 1070s to record the Battle of Hastings in 1066, in which William the Conqueror successfully invaded England, defeating the Saxon King Harold. The work is over 70 metres long and although it is called a 'tapestry' it is in fact embroidery, stitched not woven in woollen yarns on linen. It remains unknown where the tapestry was actually made, but it is thought to have been created by women in Canterbury, Kent, where there was a famous school of tapestry who used a style of work very similar to that found on the tapestry itself. Although the work was commissioned by William's brother, some parts of it are less than pro-Norman as one section shows a mother and child being forced out of the burning home, set alight by Norman soldiers.<sup>5</sup> The original tapestry is on display at Bayeux in Normandy, France. In the late nineteenth century a replica was made under the instigation of Elizabeth Wardle, a skilled embroiderer and a member of the Leek

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<sup>3</sup> Abstract for talk by Janis Jefferies titled 'Back to the Future' for the Textile Society of America Symposium 2014 <http://textilesocietyofamerica.org/lacma-plenaries/janis-jefferies/>

<sup>4</sup> Belinda von Mengersen interview April 2015

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/bayeux\\_tapestry.htm](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/bayeux_tapestry.htm)

Embroidery Society in Staffordshire. Elizabeth Wardle researched the Bayeux Tapestry<sup>8</sup> by visiting Bayeux in 1885. Thirty-five women members of the Leek Embroidery Society worked under Wardle's direction. This ambitious project was completed in just over a year. As well as members from Leek, women from Derbyshire, Birmingham, Macclesfield and London took part. Each embroiderer stitched her name beneath her completed panel.

Embroidery also features in mythology. The Greek story of **Philomela** tells how Philomela, a princess of Athens was raped by her brother-in-law, King Tereus, while she was visiting her sister Procne, in Thrace (modern Bulgaria). In order to conceal his crime, Tereus brutally cut out Philomela's tongue, so that she was unable to accuse him. He incarcerated her in an abandoned shack, where she set to work creating an embroidery that explained the narrative of her horrible story. She then sent the embroidery to her sister, who rescued Philomela, and together they plotted their revenge on Tereus, eventually transforming into birds so they could escape Tereus' fury.

These examples show that throughout history embroidery has functioned as a vehicle for quiet, subversive voices, female voices, and community voices.



# The Artists

## 1. Lucas Grogan

### Artist's background

Lucas Grogan was born in 1984 in Cooma in New South Wales. Grogan studied at the University of Newcastle before moving to Melbourne where he now lives and works. Grogan's work *The Universe Quilt*, 2013 is part of the permanent collection of Ararat Regional Art Gallery. Lucas Grogan's practice spans multiple disciplines including, drawing, painting, sculpture and embroidery.

### Artist statement

*[My] work explores themes such as identity, sexuality, shared humanity, spiritual divorce and isolationism. The Universe Quilt is a hand-embroidered work made over the span of a year. The work acts as both a microcosm (a cave) and macrocosm (the universe). As a starting off point, the centre of the quilt depicts a stylised version of the Venus of Willendorf, who acts as a guardian or benevolent mother. From there the work spirals out forming a maelstrom of references that specifically focus on images of power, both real and imagined. Together the work highlights the inherent similarities of communities across cultural and geographical boundaries and points to an interconnectedness and a trajectory for all humanity.*



Lucas Grogan  
*The Universe Quilt* 2013  
 Cotton thread on laminated cotton cloth  
 Stitch: straight stitch, seed stitch, satin stitch,  
 French knots  
 200cm x 175cm (variable)  
 Ararat Regional Art Gallery Collection  
 Image courtesy of Andrew Curtis (photographer)

## Responding

(address these questions as extended written answers, dot point answers, group discussion or discussion in pairs with reporting back to the group)

- Before or after your visit to Slipstitch research **The Venus of Willendorf**, the central image in *The Universe Quilt*. Who was she? Where did her image first appear? Can you find other artists who have been inspired by this image?
- Why do you think Lucas Grogan has made this work in black and white? How would the effect of the work change if it were in colour?
- See if you can recognise images in the quilt from different cultures
- Lucas Grogan says that *The Universe Quilt* functions as a microcosm – a cave, and a macrocosm – the universe. What features of this artwork create the feeling of a cave?
- How is space represented in *The Universe Quilt*?
- What associations do you have the quilt as an object? How does this affect the meanings and messages embodied in the artwork?

## Making

- Lucas Grogan has created other artworks in the form of quilts, and has also created a bed. You can find images of them on his website. What sort of artwork might you create using the image of a bed or bedding? It could be a textile based artwork, or a drawing, or other 2d art forms.
- Explore the history of quilt making. Make a quilt as a class project where everyone makes small piece of the quilt, and then the pieces are brought together to make the whole quilt.

## VCE Art/Studio Art

- Research other artworks that incorporate the image of the *Venus of Willendorf* image: Jeff Koons work *Balloon Venus (Magenta)* 2008–2012 and the design by Scott Eaton, *Venus of Cupertino iPad Docking Station*. Compare the different contexts of the four images including the original figurine and the central image of *The Universe Quilt*.
- Consider and compare the different cultural contexts of the artefacts, and the audiences they were intended for.

Lucas Grogan  
*The Universe Quilt* (detail) 2013  
 Cotton thread on laminated cotton cloth  
 Stitch: straight stitch, seed stitch, satin stitch,  
 French knots  
 200cm x 175cm (variable)  
 Ararat Regional Art Gallery Collection  
 Image courtesy of Andrew Curtis (photographer)





## 2. Alice Kettle

### Artist's background

Alice Kettle was born in Winchester in England in 1961. She completed a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) at the University of Reading in 1984 and a Postgraduate Diploma in Textile Art at Goldsmiths College in 1984. She is a writer and lecturer and is currently Senior Research Fellow at Manchester Metropolitan University and is Visiting Professor at the University of Winchester.

In 2000 Kettle completed a commission for the Australian National Library in Canberra, which took the form of 3 large wall hangings representing the Australian landscape in an expressive style. View the commission on Alice Kettle's website here: <http://www.alicekettle.com/commissions.cfm> She has also undertaken commissions for the High Court in Edinburgh (famous for its innovative architecture) and the Winchester Discovery Centre, for which she won a public art award.

Alice Kettle grew up in a traditional boys school where her father taught. She was one of three girls, and so in some ways she struggled to find her own voice and identity. She describes this world vividly in a recent quote on her website:

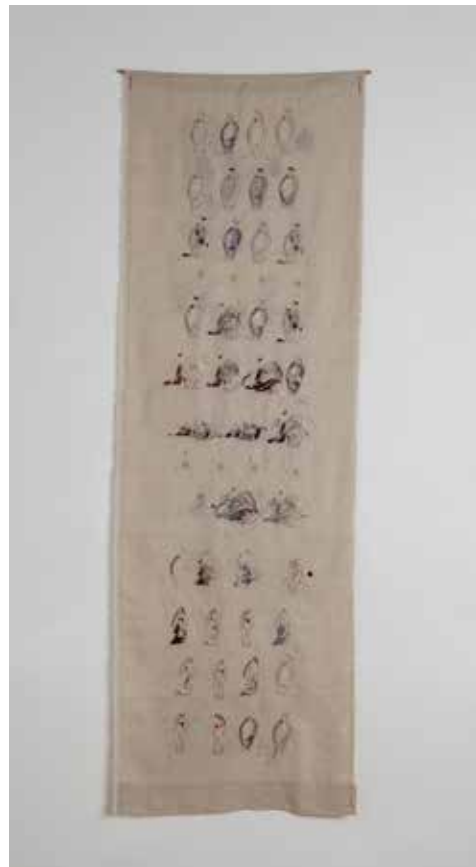
*I grew up in a huge Elizabethan house, it was deeply dark and cavenously light, with dominating aura and potency of itself. It was a living thing, creaking, watching, filled with scratchings and people I did not understand. There were haunted places you did not go, terrifyingly chilly and brooding. The walls were 6 feet thick with invisible spaces, sounds of those you could not see, smells and potencies. The house was full of boys, it was their boarding school, never safe for us girls, but where we, my sisters and I, as girls must dissolve into the panelled walls that were buzzing and alive, with stories of the past, overheard conversations of the present, to be seen and not heard.<sup>6</sup>*

Kettle's mother made all the clothes for the three girls and her grandmother knitted all their jumpers. "Textiles were very much part of the domestic language and they also became a manner of being quietly subversive and taking back control where it was lost. My mother was sophisticated and avant-garde in her creativity and this influenced me in terms of providing a way to find my own identity which was submerged in the environment I grew up in...I saw gentle women become strong and articulate through textiles. I saw a way of entering the world of the fantastic and the magical through being creative and through textiles."<sup>7</sup>

For Alice Kettle textiles opened a door to world of invention and wonder, offering a world of story, of folk and fairy tales, which provided models for reinventing the self and for resolving life's conflicts. Kettle also connects this to the story of Alice in Wonderland, a rich and surreal dream world, where a self-determined young girl breaks all the rules. Interestingly Alice Liddell, the inspiration for the character of 'Alice' also grew up in a boys school under the same circumstances, with two sisters, and used the magical world of her friend, teacher Charles Dodson's (Lewis Carroll) stories to escape the cloistered world of the school.

*The Story of the Pot* is a work that formed the launch of a project initiated by Alice Kettle through Manchester School of Art in which artists, designers and makers were brought together in pairs or threesomes, to exchange ideas, develop friendships and create work together. The project was titled *Pairings*. Here is a link to the resulting exhibition: [http://alicekettle.co.uk/?page\\_id=1114](http://alicekettle.co.uk/?page_id=1114)

*The Story of the Pot* is the result of Kettle's collaboration with potter Alex McErlain. McErlain sent Kettle a number of drawings of pots on the back of envelopes. Kettle comments: "These drawings were like gifts. For me they were like people, so I made the pot he drew become a story and become decorated, explode and become a woman and then turn back into a pot...I also was experimenting with the digital stitch where I could use a drawing that I could represent authentically as his handprint in stitch. I could then gradually change this same drawing in file through the progress of the story."



Alice Kettle  
*The Story of the Pot* 2010  
 Viscose rayon and polyester thread on linen  
 Stitch: digital embroidery; a range of digitally modified stitches  
 200cm x 66cm  
 Image courtesy of Andrew Curtis (photographer)

<sup>6</sup> <http://alicekettle.co.uk/?p=1583>

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Alice Kettle, April 2015

## Artist statement

[My] work explores the deep material connection of the cultural and human condition. [My] work in stitch connects with the traditions of embroidery as a narrative form, using archetypal and familiar stories to understand her puzzlements and creative responses to what invariably is a feminine condition. This work is part of a long collaboration with ceramicist Alex McErlain where they made pots, stitched and had fun over many conversations. McErlain's pot drawing has been translated into stitch and used to tell a story of breaking, becoming a woman and turning back into a pot.

## Responding

(address these questions as extended written answers, dot point answers, group discussion or discussion in pairs with reporting back to the group)

Compare with Arthur Boyd tapestries:

- Through this project between a textile artist and a potter, the image of the pot has been drawn into a more symbolic context as part of the design/drawing of Kettle's embroidery. Explore the symbolism of the pot by thinking about the different things that you associate with pots – it could be other objects, materials, actions, ideas or emotions.
- Discuss the use of rhythm and repetition in Kettle's work. What effect does it create? What is its purpose or function in the artwork?
- What is the impact of scale in this artwork? How would it be if the work were smaller? Or if the images were on separate pieces of fabric.
- Explore the idea of transformation – what does it mean? Think about it in terms of its physical, emotional and psychological aspects.
- What is the relationship between the background stitching and the images in the foreground? How are they treated differently?

## Making

- Create your own 'pairings' project by teaming up with another student and exchanging ideas and artworks. Perhaps you could start by exchanging drawings, and using the drawing as a basis for another artwork. Perhaps you could do this with some students in another class, like music, or drama, or creative writing.
- Use Alice Kettle's artwork *The Story of the Pot*, as the inspiration for a piece of creative writing. Kettle's story is in the form of a series of images – how would you tell this story in words. You don't have to use a linear narrative, but you can if you like.

## VCE Art/Studio Art

- In an article on Alice Kettle's website, Dr Amanda Ravetz states that Kettle's work "sparks associations with twentieth century artists such as Arthur Boyd." Explore the similarities and differences between the work of Kettle and Boyd. How did Boyd use tapestry in his practice? Research the differences and similarities between their cultural backgrounds.



Alice Kettle  
*The Story of the Pot* (detail) 2010  
 Viscose rayon and polyester thread on linen  
 Stitch: digital embroidery; a range of digitally modified stitches  
 200cm x 66cm  
 Image courtesy of Andrew Curtis (photographer)

### 3. Tim Moore

#### Artist's background

Tim Moore was born in the England in 1974. He grew up in a small village in Norfolk. He moved to Australia in 2001 and now lives and works in Sydney. Moore completed a Bachelor of Three Dimensional Design (Hons) at Brighton University, England in 1998. Moore's relationship with embroidery began on the long flight from England to Australia. Having left his drawing materials at home by mistake, he found that the only available art materials were the in-flight sewing kit, which he used to embroider four sick-bags.

Humour is an important aspect of Moore's work, and he grew up with a mother who also had a strong sense of humour. Moore's father was a painter. Comedy is often about the transgression of social boundaries, and Moore's works are characterised by cheeky, playful and revealing images.

View Tim Moore talking about his work and influences here (contains lots of playful, non-sexual references to penises): <http://www.abc.net.au/arts/stories/s3291858.htm>

Find an interview with Tim Moore in the online magazine *Dazed* here: <http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/1568/1/embroiding-nudes-tim-moore>

Tim Moore's girlfriend's mother is Sicilian and a highly skilled lace maker – a traditional craft she learned from her mother. She gave Moore a gift of thread and beautiful hand woven, Sicilian linen that her mother made in Sicily in the 1920s, which he has used as a base for his cheeky embroideries. First he draws the images on paper and then transfers it onto the linen. He then traces the drawing with linear stitching, and then fills in the shapes with bright blocks of colour. Each piece takes between 50 to 100 hours to create.

Moore has a keen sense of the absurd, and he uses images from magazines and the media to create his drawings. He has used images from *The Australian Naturalist* magazine, being attracted to the silliness of people doing everyday activities in the nude, often wearing nothing but socks, and also fishing magazines.

#### Artist statement

*[I create] comical and slightly absurd scenarios in [my] embroidered work that humorously target people's hobbies and pursuits. I joyfully embrace the comic possibilities that these interests offer, letting loose my keen sense of the incongruous in my constructed scenes. There is a charming incongruity between the use of embroidery, often dismissed as a mere ladies craft, and my risqué subject matter. There is also a lovely logic in the fact that many of the characters are naked, at least in part. I emphatically resist the tendency to conceal: process is celebrated not hidden, with the marks of the embroidery clearly visible on vintage linen backgrounds.*



Tim Moore  
*Ice Ice Baby Arm Two* 2011  
 Cotton embroidery thread on vintage  
 Irish linen  
 Stitch: running stitch, satin stitch  
 41cm x 41cm  
 Collection of Paola Morabito  
 Photographer: Cam Neville

## Responding

(address these questions as extended written answers, dot point answers, group discussion or discussion in pairs with reporting back to the group)

- What are the impacts of materials used in Tim Moore's embroideries? What meanings and messages are created by the juxtaposition of antique Sicilian and Irish linen, with Moore's humourous and irreverent images?
- Look at the different subject matter in each of the four works? What do they have in common?
- How does Tim Moore use colour in his works? Describe his approach to colour.
- What other art elements are important in Tim Moore's artworks?
- What kind of stories do these artworks tell? Can you make up a story about what has happened before or after these moments?

## Making

- Use collage to create your own funny scenarios. Think about the strange things that people do in their spare time.
- Use your collage to create another artwork, a drawing, painting, print or an embroidery work.

## VCE Art/Studio Art

- What meanings and messages about society are conveyed in the work of Tim Moore? Describe how these meanings are expressed in formal terms, using art elements.
- Describe the aesthetic qualities that are a result of the materials that Moore uses? How would these works operate differently if they were drawings or paintings?

### Artworks

RIGHT:  
 Tim Moore  
*Made up Fish 11 2010*  
 Cotton embroidery thread on hand woven vintage  
 Sicilian linen  
 Stitch: running stitch, satin stitch  
 30 x 30cm

Tim Moore  
*Bunny Bunny Same Shoes 2007*  
 Cotton embroidery thread on hand woven vintage  
 Sicilian linen  
 Stitch: running stitch, satin stitch  
 30cm x 30cm

Tim Moore  
*Man Whole Summer Fruits 2007*  
 Cotton embroidery thread on hand woven vintage  
 Sicilian linen  
 Stitch: running stitch, satin stitch  
 30cm x 30cm





## 4. Silke Raetze

### Artist's background

Silke Raetze was born in Germany in 1975, and moved to Australia as a child in 1979. She completed a Bachelor of Art at the National Art School, Sydney in 2005, majoring in painting, however her practice now encompasses a variety of materials and techniques including text-based cross-stitch embroidery. In 2009 Raetze travelled to the remote Aboriginal painting community of Peppimenarti, Northern Territory to undertake a painting workshop alongside artists such as **Regina Wilson** and **Patsy Marfura**. In 2010, pursuing an interest in natural history, she undertook a residency at the Australian Museum, Sydney.<sup>8</sup>

Raetze began to work with cross-stitch works really began when she was single and living alone, after being divorced. Some of the works make reference to her experience of the online dating world and its trials and tribulations. She has a fascination with the **traditional sampler** and how they reinforce a sense of domestic bliss and traditional values. Raetze also had a love of German folk art, which influences her depiction of figures.

### Rebecca Richards on Silke Raetze's work

Silke Raetze's works presents the viewer with a poignant question...“In an age of the commercialised self, the natural body has become increasingly inadequate. In this ever-anxious world we are actively encouraged to construct our own bodies: Raetze's cross-stitches imply that we have a freedom of choice but our options are greatly limited. So how do we reconcile with our inadequate selves? These works remind us of the cursory nature of beauty and that the (re)constructed body is still subject to illness, old age and death, but in Raetze's delicately stitched canvases there is still a dignity and elegance to the decay.”<sup>9</sup>

Silke Raetze uses the traditional and formal style of cross stitch embroidery found in 'samplers'. Samplers are cross-stitch embroidery works usually created by young girls to practice sewing – they often included letters of the alphabet, pictures or sayings that celebrate domestic work such as “Home, Sweet Home”. The earliest surviving dated sampler was stitched by an English girl, Jane Bostocke, in 1598 – just over 400 years ago. Jane's sampler contains floral and animal motifs, samples of patterns and stitches, and an alphabet.<sup>10</sup>

Samplers were often contained in a 'Glory Box' – a storage box containing items collected in preparation for a woman's wedding and married life, such as clothing, table linens, towels, bed linens, quilts and occasionally crockery. These items were collectively referred to as a trousseau, and the practice of gathering a trousseau in preparation for marriage was common up until the 1950s.<sup>11</sup>

Raetze reflects: “The messages [samplers] carried and the purpose behind their creation seemed so far removed from my reality. So I started to ask myself what would I put into a sampler like this, what would a modern woman's cross-stitch sampler look like? The resulting bodies of work are varied, some reflect on my chaotic life with titles like “My first marriage fu\*\*ed up” or “My parents wish I made money, not art” they progressed to tell the story of my internet dating experience with works such as “Partyboys, Pricks and Psychopaths Need Not Apply” and dates with men like “Mr Pot-Head” “Mr Me Me Me” or “Mr Options Open”.<sup>12</sup>



### Artworks

Silke Raetze  
*Baby (Home Sweet Home series)* 2008  
 Fabric with cottons  
 Stitch: cross-stitch  
 15.5 x 12.5 cm  
 Image courtesy of Andrew Curtis (photographer)

Silke Raetze  
*Fortune & Good Things (Proverbs series)* 2012  
 Fabric with cottons  
 Stitch: cross-stitch  
 31 x 29cm (depth 4cm) framed  
 Image courtesy of Andrew Curtis (photographer)

8 Stuart Spence, <http://www.silkeratze.com/about/bio>

9 Rebecca Richards, 2011, exhibition text for *Elegant Surrender* at the Michael Reid Gallery, <http://www.silkeratze.com/works/exhibition/21>

10 <http://www.classiccrossstitch.com/history.html>

11 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hope\\_chest](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hope_chest)

12 Interview with Silke Raetze, April 2015

## Responding

(address these questions as extended written answers, dot point answers, group discussion or discussion in pairs with reporting back to the group)



- Works from the *Elegant Surrender* series such as *Free to Choose (hair)* reflect on the “never-ending pressure on women to construct an idealised version of their bodies with Botox, breast implants and hair removal – the option to just be themselves, to be free to be themselves is conspicuously absent.”<sup>13</sup> Discuss this pressure on women in society. Where does it come from? What are the consequences of this pressure?
- How does Silke Raetze’s choice of techniques and materials affect the meaning of the text in her artworks?
- What is the relationship between text and image in Silke Raetze’s works?

## Making

- Explore traditional textile techniques, and select one that you might be able to subvert.

## VCE Art/Studio Art

- Research the work of Julie Jackson and her website *Subversive Cross Stitch*. How does Silke Raetze’s practice fit into this framework? How does her work extend these ideas?
- Look at the way Tracey Emin uses textile techniques in her work. Compare the nature of the messages in the work of Silke Raetze and Tracey Emin.

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13 ibid



## Artworks

Silke Raetze  
*Forgot To Be Pretty (Tender Trap series)* 2008  
 Fabric with cottons  
 Stitch: cross-stitch  
 15.0 cm round frame (4cm deep)  
 Image courtesy of Andrew Curtis (photographer)

Silke Raetze  
*Free to choose (hair) (Elegant Surrender series)*  
 2011  
 Fabric with cottons  
 Stitch: cross-stitch  
 30 x 36cm, (depth 4cm) framed  
 Image courtesy of Andrew Curtis (photographer)

## 5. Matthew Siwerski

### Artist's background

Matthew Siwerski was born in New Zealand in 1983. He completed a Bachelor of Fine Art at Dunedin School of Art in 2008. He moved to Australia in 2011, and now lives and works in Melbourne. Siwerski works with digital media and textiles. He creates large-scale sculptural installations that include many embroidered elements, combining his skills in digital modelling, sculpture and machine sewing. His interest in textiles developed from his exploration of gender politics and fashion. He is interested in “decoding masculinities...breaking down common beliefs and challenging social constructions”.<sup>14</sup> Although fascinated by a variety of digital technologies including 3d modelling and printing, video and programming, Siwerski requires a more physical element to his practice as well. “...at art school in the digital department and I dearly missed a hands on sculptural approach. I also strongly believe in creating your own processes and experimenting as much as possible. So I merged the two, the computer platform and working in textiles.”<sup>15</sup>

In a recent interview with the writer, Siwerski reflects on how the cultural atmosphere in New Zealand and the university town of Dunedin, where he studied, influenced his practice and his thinking. “New Zealand and Dunedin especially has a strong creative urge to it. I think it comes somewhat from its global isolation [and also] its cultural heritage of ingenuity. The big communities are overseas so if you want to do something you make it happen, and that really excites me. Owing ideas and pushing them rather than adhering to greater trends. There still is that element of course but you can see with the fashion designers coming out Dunedin and Wellington for example, there is something happening.”

In 2014 Siwerski undertook a residency in Finland which was used to research and explore a foreign cultural landscape. He plans to return to Europe this year, where he will reside in the historical textile city of Lodz, Poland, to undergo further research and experimentation in contemporary textile art. He will also look into the history of textiles through connecting with The Central Museum of Textiles. Lodz is famous for its textile industry, and so much of the focus of the museum is on mechanised and industrial techniques of production. The trip to Poland will also be an opportunity for Siwerski to explore his Eastern European heritage and his personal resonance with Polish culture. He has recently made contact with and met his extended family in Poland for the first time. Having grown up without a strong sense of family history this has been an exciting connection for him to make.

*“I’ve always been curious about travel and experiencing other cultures...just getting to Europe for the first time last year, starting with a residency in Finland. The more I see the more I realize how unique (and precious) my environment in NZ was. But I seek growth and experience and that will all feed back into my work.”*

### Artist statement (excerpt)

*For me, working with just simple black thread, free-stitched on a domestic sewing machine is a raw and direct way to express my thoughts. Looking at the way graffiti is thrown onto the city canvas, finding a natural and primitive level of existence and mark marking. My embroidered pieces are traced from drawings, photographs or digital manipulations of the two. I like the idea of everything having a complicated dual existence from online/digital culture and also social constructions, you could say Roland Bathes Mythologies or Guy Debord’s Society of the Spectacle were early references for me. The process of using thread brings the imagery into a new context of historical processes, e.g. tapestry, embroidery.*

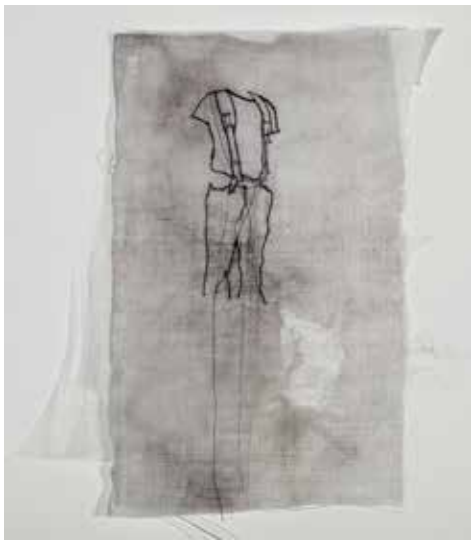
<sup>14</sup> Matthew Siwerski, 2015, unedited artists statement for *Slipstitch* catalogue

<sup>15</sup> Matthew Siwerski, April 2015, interview



Matthew Siwerski  
*Hood (Self-portrait series) (detail) 2014*  
 Black embroidery thread on water soluble stabiliser,  
 found polypropylene and tissue stabiliser  
 Stitch: free machine embroidery, straight lockstitch  
 35 x 46cm  
 Image courtesy of Andrew Curtis (photographer)





In the act of machine embroidery I can utilize a gestural mark making process that works for me more than drawing on paper. I like how it is in one state sculptural and illustrative. Loose threads, thread jams, exposed materials such as stabilizers are all used in my gestural process. I've started out with embroidery hoops and pins etc., but later rejecting them to fully embrace a quick working style. Most works are left unfinished, in a state of 'draftedness' or like sketches for a proposed greater project maybe. By creating my own gritty and dishevelled aesthetics, I seek to fragment our current treatment of textiles as popular social/consumer mind frames, and try to then infuse a more honest, holistic existence.

### Style, Technique, Materials

Siwerski's works display what he refers to as a 'deconstructed' aesthetic. "I like unearthing structure and looking at systems, glitches are particularly interesting 'makers marks'...a smudge or thread jam."

While at art school he had the opportunity to explore computer aided embroidery, which allowed the precise recreations of digital designs. Although he no longer has access to this technology, he still incorporates digital technologies in his drawing process by using computer designs to plan out his own free-stitch embroidery. "I like using multiple platforms in a process and not being too hung up on trying to define if its digital art or drawing or textile etc."

Siwerski is fascinated by the use of 'dissolvable fabric'. "It comes in different thicknesses, and it's a see-through plasticity material. You can use it to trace drawings and plans and then sew it directly onto the fabric you are using - it easily dissolves away to nothing with water. I ended up leaving it on most of my work though. I liked the plastic and semi opaque finish it left. A lot of my work is about exposing the materials I work with, I don't want to appear like I've performed a trick and it's the 'artists secret'."

### Responding

(address these questions as extended written answers, dot point answers, group discussion or discussion in pairs with reporting back to the group)

- Siwerski's work *Hood* shows a hood without a face. All we see is the outline of a fragment of profile. This work is a self-portrait. What aspects of 'self' are represented here?
- Has Siwerski used technology in his works in *Slipstitch*? What techniques has he used?
- How does Siwerski's use of materials challenge a traditional approach to embroidery?
- In what ways can you see the influence of Siwerski's interest in fashion design?

### Making

- Make a garment or textile work that exposes the construction of the work. Experiment with how you can use these deconstructed elements to create decorative elements in your piece.

### VCE Art/Studio Art

- Research contemporary fashion designers in New Zealand.
- What constitutes a 'deconstructed' aesthetic? Describe its' qualities. Where are they evident in Matthew Siwerski's work? Make reference to his previous works.
- What other fashion designers have used this style? Does it occur in other art and design disciplines? Research some examples.

### Artworks

Matthew Siwerski  
*Boy (Self-portrait series)* 2014  
 Black embroidery thread on water soluble stabiliser,  
 found polypropylene and tissue stabiliser  
 Stitch: free machine embroidery, straight lockstitch  
 30 x 38cm  
 Image courtesy of Andrew Curtis (photographer)

Matthew Siwerski  
*Shirt (Self-portrait series)* 2014  
 Black embroidery thread on water soluble stabiliser,  
 found polypropylene and tissue stabiliser  
 Stitch: free machine embroidery, straight lockstitch  
 43 x 33cm  
 Image courtesy of Andrew Curtis (photographer)



## 6. Sera Waters

### Artist's background

Sera Waters was born in 1979 in Murray Bridge, South Australia. In 2000 she graduated from the South Australian School of Art, and in 2006 she completed a Masters degree in Art History at the University of Adelaide. She is now an Adelaide-based artist, writer, and lecturer, and currently teaches at Adelaide Central School of Art. In 2006 Waters was awarded the Ruth Tuck Scholarship to attend the Royal School of Needlework (Hampton Court Palace, England) to study hand embroidery. It was here that she learned about the meticulous, traditional technique of Black Work, which has been highly influential on her practice ever since. She is particularly interested in colonial Australian history, using her own family history as starting point of reference. She is currently undertaking a PhD, for which the title of her thesis is *Settling Ghosts: a visual arts enquiry into repetitious acts of making home in settler Australia*.

Waters mother has worked extensively to uncover her family history, and has traced the family generations in South Australia as far back as 1838. In recent years this has inspired Waters in the themes that she explores in her artwork. *"It didn't begin that way, but as I have learned more about Australia's history, and how Australia was settled, I have been asking about where my ancestors were, what they did and experienced...A lot of this history involves forms of home-making, or ways to try to feel a sense of belonging."* Waters is interested in revisiting this history with a feminist perspective, and she explores how home-making involved forms of labour and materials (such as textiles) that have long been undervalued. *"My material language and my focus upon the home and a domestic language are ways to explore a past that hasn't necessarily made the history books."*

Waters traces her decision to become an artist back to a number of influences from her childhood: the books of Roald Dahl and Enid Blyton, her mother's interest in craft, and doing work experience with an interior decorator. *"When I was a child I was really enchanted by the possibility of creativity, making crafts, inventing worlds...I was surrounded by the results of hobbyists – our family beach house still has framed Semco long stitches and framed jigsaw puzzles on the walls, and until recently macramé light shades made by my mum in the 70s. I did work experience with a rather eccentric interior decorator in high school, Kevin Hein in Mount Gambier, whose training had been in department store window display in the UK. We got along really well and I continued to work with him most Saturday mornings until the end of high school. He taught me a lot about textiles, colour and vision...when I had children textiles became even more central in my practice for I could pick it up and put it down more easily between sleeps/feeds etc."*<sup>16</sup>

### Artist statement

*My practice is characterised by black-work, a darkly stitched meticulousness, and uses time as a medium: I make repetitively, laboriously and intimately. Through these methods I dwell upon the legacies of Australia's settler colonial past, to contemplate how this past's reverberations haunt us today and how I am implicated by ancestry within our shared histories. I particularly draw upon my own family knowledge: my European ancestors began arriving in Port Misery, South Australia, as early as 1839 to find shelter in caves, temporary tents and eventually durable dwellings. They have left in their wake complex tangles of encounter, emotion, and stories whose traces have passed along the generations, into my being.*

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<sup>16</sup> Sera Waters, April 2015, interview with the writer



Sera Waters

*The Great Australian Bite: Gums 2011*

Linen, cotton, crewel, beads, sequins, trimmings, chain, card, stuffing, leather, tea-towel, felt.

Stitch: black work, crewel work

54 x 61 x 3cm (variable)

Image courtesy of Andrew Curtis (photographer)



These traces I have discovered within golf courses, tea towels, frosted-glass porthole, a bite, rose gardens, historic villages and other unexpected locations, all of which emerge in my 'domestic' artworks. The strange make-do porthole of *Drowning B(u)oy* for example, merges memories from my Grandmother's home with my shimmery stitched self rising ominously from the horizon. The months of repetitive labour within this work acted like a portal, creating mind space to think about the unsettling consequences of settling. Many historic tangles have gone unnoticed, been buried, or remain now only as fragments and riddled with gaps. I see my art practice as re-imagining the space between the remaining records, between birth and death certificates for example, to recognise the silent spaces of the past that cannot be ignored in our present.

### The Technique of Black Work

Black work is similar to cross-stitch in that it is a counted thread embroidery technique. Historically it was popular in the Tudor period in England and was often used on collars, cuffs and home textiles. There are a wide variety of patterns that can be selected and invented, and the technique is labour intensive, requiring patience and repetition. Through her studies of black work at the Royal School of Needlework Waters found that the technique brought together her interests in textiles and pattern, and she was fascinated by the way in which the embroidery appears to become part of the linen. "The RSN specialises in a form of black work that uses shaded tones (through differing thread thicknesses) for portraiture – and I have often tried to create this effect and have developed my initial black black work into coloured. I also spend a lot of time selecting the black work pattern – for each of them invoke a slightly different reading, this is useful for a complexity that shifts into different readings of my work whether close or further away."

Studying in Hampton Court palace we were often let in before the tourists so I could walk through alone and feel the history. I studied a range of summer school courses that were very traditional and technical. My theory is you need to learn the skills and rules in order to break them. Sera Waters, recent interview

Find links to several articles by and about Sera Waters on her website here:  
<http://serawaters.com.au/p/writings>

### Responding

(address these questions as extended written answers, dot point answers, group discussion or discussion in pairs with reporting back to the group)

- Discuss the use of abstraction in Sera Waters work – how does it relate to titles and the images in her embroidery works
- How has Sera Waters applied the traditional technique of black work? Where does her work depart from the traditional technique?
- Describe how colour is use in these works?
- Note the variety of materials in Sera Waters works – how many can you find?

### Making

- Sera Waters is inspired by the history of her family in South Australia in colonial times.
- Research your family's history. When did they arrive in Australia? Where did they come from?
- What aspects of your family history could you draw on to create artworks?

### VCE Art/Studio Art

- Explore Sera Waters practice, especially her sculptural works. Where do you see evidence of a feminist viewpoint? Compare these works to other female artists who have used textiles as a medium such as Meret Oppenheim and the sculptures of Dorothea Tanning.

#### Artworks

Sera Waters  
*Drowning B(u)oy* 2014  
 Linen, cotton, card, LED light, saddle felt, veneer  
 Stitch: black work  
 65cm (diameter) x 11cm (w)

Sera Waters  
*The Great Australian Bite: Cavernous* 2011  
 Linen, cotton, crewel, beads, sequins, trimmings, chain, card, stuffing, leather, tea-towel, felt  
 Stitch: black work, crewel work  
 57cm x 64cm x 3cm (variable)

ABOVE:  
 Sera Waters  
*Solace in Port Misery* 2012  
 Hand-dyed linen, embroidery thread, stuffing, hand-dyed string, shells, card, found frame  
 Stitch: silk shading  
 155cm x 20cm (variable)  
 Image courtesy of Andrew Curtis (photographer)



## 7. Elyse Watkins

### Artists Background

Elyse Watkins was born in 1988 in Newcastle, New South Wales. She now lives and works in Melbourne. Watkins has degrees in both visual arts and psychology. Psychological concepts deeply imbue her visual artworks.

Like Sera Waters, Elyse Watkins' family has been in Australia for many generations, and she also shares the desire to connect with her colonial female ancestors. But rather than connecting through the types of labour undertaken, she draws an intimate connection through the physical organs of her body, the head, hand and internal sexual organs.

During her teenage years she spent time on a family farm with horses, and this influenced her interest in the use of horsehair as a material in her art practice.

### Artists Statement

*Stitching and drawing grounds me in the moment. Embroidery is a quiet pastime I have taken almost everywhere. This art form allows me to be at once present in an environment, inconspicuous and happily occupied. Coming from a drawing background, I approach a needle and thread as if it were a pencil. Unconstrained by formal embroidery techniques, I feel free to experiment with unlikely materials. Natural fibres are a central element of my practice as they bring a past life and an innate vulnerability to my work. I enjoy re-expressing and exploring objects and imagery from other times and places to draw connection between my own experiences and those of imagined others who have gone before. In the current work, I have drawn on both my fascination with early sketches of the female anatomy, and my admiration of the hardships faced by colonial women. I have attempted to reveal the discord which exists between deceptively calm exteriors, and well hidden internal suffering.*

### Materials and Techniques

*The technical advantages of horsehair are that the thickness of the individual strands vary depending on if the hair comes from the tail (thicker hair) or the main of the horse (finer hair), thus I could work with the difference in hair thickness to create darker/thicker vs. lighter/finer lines when 'drawing' with the hair using my stitching technique. Another advantage of stitching with horsehair is that it brings its own body and movement to the work which allows the strands to 'sit' in the structure of the fabric without needing to be tied down. A disadvantage is that some of these strands of horsehair may slip out of the fabric over time if the fabric moves significantly. However, I like the ephemeral quality this brings to my work.*

*The background more ghostly images are created from large-scale photocopies of my drawings (lead pencil on textured drawing paper) which have been photocopied onto special heat-transfer paper which when heated (using a heating press) transfers the photocopied image onto the fabric. This is the same process used when ironing a 'transfer' onto a t-shirt.<sup>17</sup>*

Watkins' work in *Slipstitch* echoes her interest in psychology – peeling back the to the inner workings of the body. Ghostly images drawn and transferred onto sheer organza, show nineteenth century women's clothing – gloves, bonnets and aprons. Only the skin is missing, we see the outer cultural trappings and the raw inner structures of the body. She says of this dual view that *"the internal and external realms of the female body have been examined in fine detail in order to illustrate the internal realm of emotions and external realm of reasons."*<sup>18</sup>



Elyse Watkins  
*Glove and Hand - Unbridled Mind series* (detail)  
 2010  
 Hand embroidery with horsehair on two layers of silk; horsehair, silk organza, silk georgette, photographic heat transfer.  
 Stitch: straight stitch  
 65 x 91cm  
 Image courtesy of Andrew Curtis (photographer)

<sup>17</sup> Elyse Watkins, April 2015, interview with the writer

<sup>18</sup> Elyse Watkins, 2015, *Slipstitch* Catalogue, NETS Victoria and Ararat Regional Art Gallery

## Responding

(address these questions as extended written answers, dot point answers, group discussion or discussion in pairs with reporting back to the group)

- Watkins works in *Slipstitch* are all grouped under the title *The Unbridled Mind* series. Reflect on the meaning of this title. What associations does it give rise to? How does it affect the way that you interpret the images?
- Elyse Watkins is seeking to draw a connection with her colonial ancestors. How does her use of horsehair relate to that? How do you think that colonial Australians sensed their relationship with horses? How is that different to contemporary Australians? In urban centres? In regional communities?
- Describe the nature of the way line is used in Elyse Watkins works?
- The works use images of internal organs and muscle structures. How does that affect the mood of the artworks?
- What is the relationship between the images of clothing and the human body in these works? Consider the materials and techniques used. How does this affect the meanings and messages in the works?

## Making

- Collect a variety of unusual material that you could use to sew or weave. These could be natural or artificial.
- Create a textile work with the materials you have collected.

## VCE Art/Studio Art

- Elyse Watkins uses images of anatomy to create a bridge between herself and her ancestors. We share our bodies with past people, and yet the way bodies are viewed culturally can change greatly over time. Research how women's bodies were viewed in the nineteenth century, especially with regard to women's health, for instance the phenomena of hysteria. How does this research impact on your response to Elyse Watkins works?

### Artworks

Elyse Watkins

*Apron and Ovaries - Unbridled Mind series 2010*  
Hand embroidery with horsehair on two layers of silk; horsehair, silk organza, silk georgette, photographic heat transfer.  
Stitch: straight stitch  
81 x 91cm

*Bonnet and Head - Unbridled Mind series 2010*  
Hand embroidery with horsehair on two layers of silk; horsehair, silk organza, silk georgette, photographic heat transfer.  
Stitch: straight stitch  
77 x 99cm

*Glove and Hand - Unbridled Mind series 2010*  
Hand embroidery with horsehair on two layers of silk; horsehair, silk organza, silk georgette, photographic heat transfer.  
Stitch: straight stitch  
65 x 91cm

Image courtesy of Andrew Curtis (photographer)



## 8. Ilka White

### Artists Background

Ilka White, born in 1972, lives and works in Melbourne, and grew up in Central Victoria. She holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Monash University and an Associate Diploma from Melbourne Institute of Textiles (now RMIT). She taught textiles and design at RMIT University from 1999 to 2011. White has exhibited internationally and her work is represented in the National Gallery of Australia, National Gallery of Victoria and RMIT University collections. White's art practice is very broad ranging; incorporating community projects, travel to study textiles with different cultures, installation, sculpture, performance and cross-disciplinary collaboration. Her family background has inspired her to create works that speak about the connectedness between people and nature, that connect humanity to its foundation in nature and to our cultural histories. Ilka grew up in Central Victoria, and enjoyed connecting with nature on regular family camping holidays. Her father is a passionate advocate for permaculture, responsible for creating the magazine National Permaculture. White remembers watching him laying out the magazine at home, carefully considering design decisions, exercising his strong visual sensibility. White's mother is a singer songwriter, who works extensively with community choirs. White also took inspiration from her paternal grandmother. Her grandmother had a tough upbringing and only went to school until she was 5 years old, but she was a self-taught, creative and inventive seamstress who didn't follow established rules, and used whatever she had to hand.<sup>19</sup>

As well as drawing inspiration from her family, White has been strongly influenced by various writers and philosophers. White's sense of the importance of our connectedness to nature has been influenced and supported by the book *The Story of Feeling* written in 1995 by Arnhem Land storyman Bill Neidje (1920-2002), the work of poet Mary Oliver, and philosopher/therapist Eugene Gendlin. These writings and the work of Cultural ecologist and 'geophilosopher' David Abram, are associated with new definitions of thought such as 'geopoetics' and 'geophilosophy'. These modes of enquiry and expression give voice to the interconnectedness between the natural world and our processes of thinking and feeling. They represent a move away from traditional Western ways of viewing reality: "[Geopoetics] is deeply critical of Western thinking and practice over the last 2500 years and its separation of human beings from the rest of the natural world, and proposes instead that the universe is a potentially integral whole, and that the various domains into which knowledge has been separated can be unified by a poetics which places the planet Earth at the centre of experience...It also seeks to express that sensitive and intelligent contact with the world by means of a poetics i.e. a language drawn from a way of being which attempts to express reality in different ways e.g. oral expression, writing, visual arts, music, and in combinations of different art forms."<sup>20</sup>

*In my blood, in my arm is grass, all one and the same.*<sup>21</sup>  
Bill Neidje, 'The Story of Feeling'.



### Artworks

Ilka White

*Sentience* 2015

Indigo dyed hemp thread, digitally printed silk twill,  
silk organza lining  
Stitch: running stitch, couching  
48cm x 58 cm

ABOVE:

*Sustenance (detail)* 2015

Indigo dyed hemp thread, digitally printed silk twill,  
silk organza lining  
Stitch: running stitch, couching  
48cm x 58 cm  
Courtesy of the artist  
Photographer: Kristian Laemmle-Ruff

*Breath* 2014

Indigo dyed hemp thread, digitally printed silk twill,  
silk organza lining  
Stitch: running stitch, couching  
48cm x 58 cm

<sup>19</sup> Telephone interview with Ilka White, 20/4/15

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.geopoetics.org.uk/welcome/what-is-geopoetics>

<sup>21</sup> Neidje, Bill, *The Story of Feeling*, Magabala Books, 1995

Here is a link to an article by Michael Farrell about *The Story of Feeling* by Bill Neidje. It is an academic text, but includes interesting extracts from the book, and is reasonably accessible for senior students.

<http://www.nla.gov.au/openpublish/index.php/jasal/article/viewFile/2733/3706>

### Artist Statement

*My practice spans projects in textiles, drawing, sculpture and installation, video, and art-in-community. My abiding interests in world textile traditions and cross-disciplinary collaboration often inform how I make and teach. For some years now, direct engagement with the natural world (and the forces at work therein) has also been central to my making process. I frequently recall moments when the mind extends way out beyond the skull and time, place and body blur into a single state of being. These embroideries explore 'interconnectedness' themes via human relationship with the rest of the natural world. They relate to previous works I have made in response to place; personal epiphanies amid sand dunes, appreciation for the wind in the grasses, resonance with the land and conversations with the sky.*

The titles of Ilka White's three works reflect her engagement with the natural world and her exploration of the relationships between the mind, body, and breath. *Sentience* means the ability to perceive and feel, and it also relates to consciousness, and *Sustenance* to the nourishment of our bodies, but also to the things that we draw on to create meaning in our lives. In particular the work *Breath* is influenced by White's time spent with Tasmanian woodblock printer Michael Schlitz. Schlitz carves horizontal lines into his woodblocks that echo the lines of the grain in the wood, and these horizontal lines are reflected in White's work.

White has recently completed work for *Group Exchange: 2nd Tamworth Triennial* in collaboration with a photographer, philosopher, jeweler, printer, embroiderers and others.

<http://www.tamworthregionalgallery.com.au/triennial.php>

Selected articles about Ilka White are available on her website here:

<http://ilkawhite.com.au/articles/>

### Artworks

Ilka White

*Sentience* 2015

Indigo dyed hemp thread, digitally printed silk twill,  
silk organza lining

Stitch: running stitch, couching

48cm x 58 cm

RIGHT:

*Sustenance* 2015

Indigo dyed hemp thread, digitally printed silk twill,  
silk organza lining

Stitch: running stitch, couching

48cm x 58 cm

Courtesy of the artist

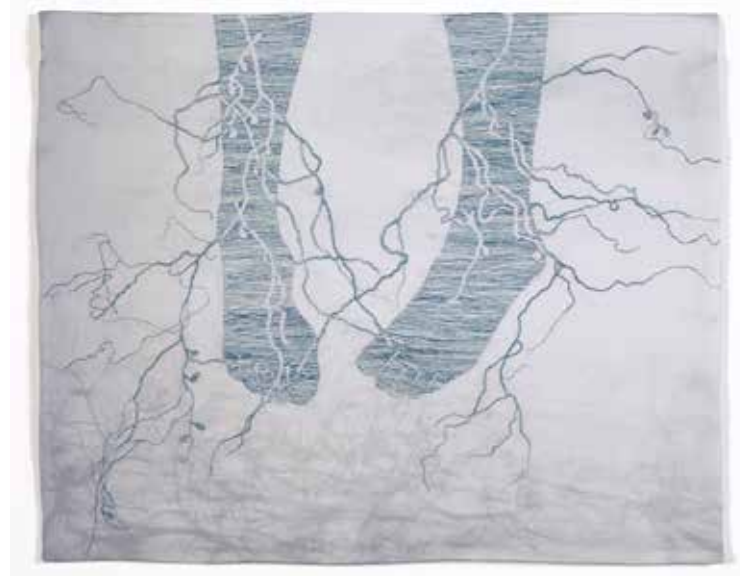
Photographer: Kristian Laemmle-Ruff

*Breath* 2014

Indigo dyed hemp thread, digitally printed silk twill,  
silk organza lining

Stitch: running stitch, couching

48cm x 58 cm



### **Responding**

(address these questions as extended written answers, dot point answers, group discussion or discussion in pairs with reporting back to the group)

- Describe how the art elements of colour and line are used in Ilka White's work.
- Describe how the images are layered in the works – in terms of techniques and materials - how does this affect the meaning of the images?
- Like some of the other artworks in *Slipstitch*, Ilka White's series of artworks is mainly monochromatic – this has an impact on how we perceive the other elements such as line and pattern. Reflect on how this works.
- How is shape created in these works?

### **Making**

- Make an artwork, textile-based or otherwise focusing on pattern and line. Explore how you can use line to create other elements in your work, for example tone and shape.
- Research the work of David Abram. Consider your response to his ideas and make an artwork to express that response.

### **VCE Art/Studio Art**

- Some of Ilka White's work has strongly influenced by her conversations with Tasmanian printmaker Michael Schlitz. Find the prints that have been most influential and compare them with Ilka Whites works:  
<http://michaelschlitz.com/projects/the-nature-of-things-flora/>

### Introduction:

#### The Curator

Interview with Belinda von Mengersen, April 2015

[http://www.griffith.nsw.gov.au/cp\\_themes/theatre/page.asp?p=DOC-QVB-14-08-70](http://www.griffith.nsw.gov.au/cp_themes/theatre/page.asp?p=DOC-QVB-14-08-70)

#### Slipstitch Themes

<http://textilesocietyofamerica.org/lacma-plenaries/janis-jefferies/>

<http://www.tamworthregionalgallery.com.au/triennial.php>

<http://www.cv.vic.gov.au/stories/creative-life/textiles-and-fibre-art/textiles-fibre-art-ararat-regional-art-gallery/>

<http://araratregionalartgallery.blogspot.com.au/2013/06/making-time-art-of-john-corbett-1974.html>

[http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/bayeux\\_tapestry.htm](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/bayeux_tapestry.htm)

### Artist References

#### Lucas Grogan

<http://www.lucasgrogan.com/>

#### Alice Kettle

<http://www.alicekettle.com/>

<http://www.theage.com.au/news/entertainment/arts/2009/11/03/1257010156514.html>

#### Tim Moore

<http://www.abc.net.au/arts/stories/s3291858.htm>

<http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/1568/1/embroiding-nudes-tim-moore>

#### Silke Raetze

<http://www.silkeretze.com/>

<http://www.classiccrossstitch.com/history.html>

#### Matthew Siwerski

<http://www.mattsiwerski.com/>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central\\_Museum\\_of\\_Textiles,\\_%C5%81%C3%B3d%C5%BA](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Museum_of_Textiles,_%C5%81%C3%B3d%C5%BA)

#### Sera Waters

<http://serawaters.com.au/>

#### Elyse Watkins

[http://www.theloop.com.au/Elyse\\_Watkins\\_/portfolio/portfolio-elyse-watkins/16431](http://www.theloop.com.au/Elyse_Watkins_/portfolio/portfolio-elyse-watkins/16431)

#### Ilka White

<http://www.geopoetics.org.uk/welcome/what-is-geopoetics/>

<http://michaelschlitz.com/>

<http://ilkawhite.com.au/>