

Meg Cowell graduated with Honours in Photography from the University of Tasmania in 2007, and has gone on to exhibit nationally and abroad. In 2013, she was a finalist in the 2013 Josephine Ulrick and Win Schubert Award. In 2012 Meg completed a mentorship with acclaimed artist Deborah Paauwe with whom Cowell was paired through the mentorship program during her post-graduate work at the University of South Australia.

Meg's large-scale photographic artworks depict theatrical garments, lingerie and couture that have been arranged and illuminated while suspended in water. For this purpose Meg installed a 1000 litre pool in her backyard, in which she suspends and arranges her subjects, using water as a medium of buoyancy and illusionistic display. In submerging her subjects Meg aims to generate a sense of the garments being 'inhabited' not only by their absent wearer, but also by a complex of moods and emotions. The physical act of fashioning these inanimate subjects motivates her engagement with the nature of 'absence' and the use of fabric and clothing as a medium of visual expression.

ARTIST STATEMENT - TO THE SURFACE

My large-scale photographic artworks depict theatrical garments, lingerie and couture that have been arranged and illuminated while suspended in water. For this purpose I have installed a 1000 litre pool in my inner-city backyard, in which I suspend and arrange my selected artefacts, using water as a medium of buoyancy and illusionistic display. I select my subjects for their associations with the icons of rites-of-passage in Western myth, specifically the princess archetype and its contemporary manifestation in the ritual of the white wedding dress. My objective in submerging my subjects is to generate a sense of the garments being 'inhabited' not only by their absent wearer, but also by a complex of moods, emotions and characters. The physical act of transforming my inanimate subjects to express pose, emotion and character has motivated my engagement with the symbolism of clothing as a vehicle of transformation and medium of visual expression.

The subjects of my photographs elicit an expressive sense that can be connected with a symbolic power, and an age-old allure, of depicted fabric and clothing. Particularly within examples from the Italian Renaissance wherein fabric is depicted as an agent of spiritual energy, billowing with agitated rhythm, or simply draped meaningfully within the picture field.

Drawing on such examples has allowed me to engage with fabric in terms of sensory and emotional values. I aim to evoke feelings by the weight, colour, quantity, of the fabric, and by the way it is

depicted whether it is smooth or ruffled, as well common pictorial devices that use fabric to emphasise the movement and contours of the wearer. In this way I am able to arrange and manipulate fabric in a way that communicates something beyond what the garment itself, in its originally intended use, can convey.

Literary references have also been informing my subjects's symbolic and poetic function. Specifically, Shakespeare's Ophelia with her pluming dress and constellation of flowers, having thrown herself into the river with a gesture symbolic of what had already happened to her soul she is spiritually dismembered, floating unanchored. Similarly, Dickens's tortured character Miss Havisham from *Great Expectations* with her moth-eaten wedding dress and the tragedy of her plight.

Fairy tales and children's book illustrations have inspired my interest in the transformative symbolism of clothing, particularly where feminine garments operate as vehicles of transformation, as in Disney adaptations in which the downtrodden character becomes a princess through the wearing of the dress. In its contemporary manifestation this transformative garment represents a vehicle of social and public transformation as for example with Princess Dianna's enormous bell-shaped confection that figured in her transition from civilian woman to a real-life princess.

Although my subjects operate within a dream space of fantasy and illusion, the contrasting nature of the work as photography presents an important double edge; the subject is understood as necessarily present, frozen within the fluid scenario of movement. The camera reveals satiny textures, florid colors and tendrils of fragile underskirt- suggesting an incipient process of osmosis, reminding the viewer of water's symbolic associations with transformation.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5aUyIOM2Q7U>