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The Garment of Infinite Promise

An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Design

At Massey University, Wellington New Zealand

Helen Huitema 2022

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The Garment of Infinite Promise

MDes - Helen Huitema 2021–2022

Abstract

Keywords - memory, perception, nostalgia, female identity, wellbeing, emotional connection, textile skills, hand-made craft, textiles education, auto-ethnography.

In this project a series of textile artefacts and objects are produced as roads into engagement with the practices involved in the making of clothing and other textile practice. My own design process of interweaving technology use with handcraft methods are highlighted as being idiosyncratic to textile practice and recognisable to many practitioners. These textile artefacts are populated with familiar household settings, landscapes, and textile tools with a view to immerse viewers in nostalgia for times and practices in which they may or may not have been involved. Positive effects on mental health through involvement and learning processes of textiles are investigated through reflection and evaluation of my own practice, connected literature, and contextual information to evaluate why it may be culturally, educationally, and personally beneficial to engage in textiles practice. Furthermore, I am displaying how both the academic and practical problem-solving skills involved which form the basis of secondary school technology curriculum are contemporary and relevant.

The project explores the role that textile practice including the making of garments and objects, and personal collecting of fabric or fabric stashes have played in preserving memory, evoking nostalgia, and forming collective identity in Aotearoa New Zealand. Through doing so, it calls for textiles to be more greatly valued as a discipline within the educational curriculum, thus assuring a strong future for textiles practice. Using a practice approach, it identifies the significance of textiles in our dominant western culture in relation to women's identity, and how textiles practice has been side-lined by policy makers in education. The binary between academic learning and learning-through-making is challenged through an autoethnographic reflection and evaluation of my own practice and connected

literature and contextual information around attitudes to the skills and technology processes involved in the making of textiles objects and garments.

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Introduction

When I was nineteen in The Netherlands, at a picnic, I saw a woman riding past on a bicycle. She had long dark hair, was stick thin, and wore a soft linen box-pleated full-length skirt in a dark aquamarine colour, together with a black T-shirt. The movement of the skirt, the colour and fabric, and the style this represented to me is still clear in my mind and has never left me. This was one of many artefacts of textiles in motion, since early childhood, that has formed my fascination and engagement with Textiles as a discipline, the most enduring interest in my life. I am a first-generation Aotearoa New Zealander from parents who emigrated in 1956 from the Netherlands. Although both Dutch nationals, they come from Friesland—a northern province with its own language, ethnicity, and identity which the Friesians are struggling to preserve. By coincidence, my Friesian surname is very similar to many Māori surnames, so it has often been assumed in Aotearoa New Zealand that I am of Māori descent, and when this is clarified, it is assumed that I am of Dutch descent. This confusion about my parents' language and as immigrants and my own identity in Aotearoa New Zealand has led me into an exploration of social memory and identity in this country.

In 2020 I undertook a Graduate Diploma in Textiles Design and explored my family background in textile practice as a discipline and the different ways I had acquired the skills as a maker that have led me into my role as an educator in textiles design. These skills were acquired through a mix of observing and collaborating with my mother, experimentation, and formal education.

Within the Graduate Diploma in Textiles at Massey University in 2020 I created a collection of four fabrics that drew on my early impressions and experiences of exposure to textiles and making, which were manifold as my mother was a skilled dressmaker. The collection was nostalgic in theme and drew on images of garments my mother had created both for her sisters in Friesland and for herself after arriving in Aotearoa New Zealand. This collection became the catalyst for further exploration of my own, and others' textiles experiences, how these created identity, and how this was situated in a social and educational context in Aotearoa New Zealand.



Fig. 1-4.

Through my practice and writing I examine the role of textiles practice in navigating nostalgia and the creation of memory and identity. With a focus on public, social, and personal female identity in Aotearoa New Zealand I am examining the role of textile garments, fabrics, and objects in developing and maintaining female identity through a literature and contextual review. My focus is on the importance and value of the skills and processes involved in the making of these artefacts and whether and why the value of real, measurable skills of dressmaking and crafting have been ignored in favour of a focus on

finished products. Examining the balance and perceived value between the process of making and the commodity produced is crucial to address the need for education in this field.

I have used textile techniques of sewing, felting, dyeing fabric, and hand and machine embroidery to recreate nostalgic artefacts and domestic scenes from bygone eras when women would use these techniques and skills in the household. I have used screen printing and digital embroidery as a tool in my design process and construction—rather than as a product—linking my contemporary practice to the tools I discovered in learning to sew and make patterns many years ago. Images I have created are situated in Aotearoa New Zealand to engage those for whom textiles learning and practice may be a distant memory, but also to reach those for whom these artefacts may induce nostalgic resonance. Nostalgic resonance is the nostalgia we may feel for things we have never actually encountered such as the nostalgia induced by Aotearoa New Zealand alpine images for Aotearoa New Zealanders living overseas, who may never have seen them in real life (Ramakers 24).

The artefacts of technology I have created, such as sewing machines and other dressmaking tools are representative of the processes I am focusing on, while other artefacts are populated with textile practitioners and landscapes as retrieved from my own layered memories to connect with others' textiles memories.

As an educator in the textiles field, my design focus in this Master's project is to design objects and artefacts made from textiles with the aim to engage or re-engage people with textiles and to reconnect them with the fabrics, garments, and tools through which they first encountered textiles. To contextualize my practice and unpack the issues that have surfaced through my practice I have examined, through literature review, how textiles practice has expressed and developed identity for practitioners from different cultures, the gendered political implications and history of the value of textile practice and education in Aotearoa New Zealand and asks whether we need to raise the cultural value of these practices in educational spheres.

The scope of the project will cover the areas of memory and gendered identity, dressmaking, home-sewing, and education through the lens of my personal creative practice and textiles learning and its positioning in secondary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand. The effects on well-being through textiles practice are also examined. Although sustainability in

textiles is a closely related subject, a possible outcome of closer engagement with textiles, and inherent in my own design work due to my war generation mother's recycling skills, it is outside of the scope of this project, as are related crafts such as knitting, weaving, and crochet.

Context and Research Questions

How does textile practice contribute to personal and collective identity formation in Aotearoa New Zealand and how can and why should we subsequently advocate for the value of textiles in education?

Target Audience

- Textiles practitioners researching benefits of engaging with textiles practice.
- Educational policymakers and educators of children, adolescents, and adult students looking to create relevant and authentic courses of learning to engage students.

Chapter 1

Methodology and Design Process

Methodology

The ethnography of my own engagement with the textiles medium over fifty years is backgrounded by a research-based social history of Aotearoa New Zealand with a focus on the relationship between female experience and textiles practice.

Practice-based design has led me on an iterative discovery through an exploration of traditional textiles techniques and new technologies to create nostalgic resonance for viewers. The range of techniques available, and photographic artefacts to work with from my own personal biography were vast. The selection chosen by me reflects the times in my life I

consider to be the most liminal, either through age or experience, as these were the most formative experiences in terms of learning and intensity and will invoke similar memories in viewers. The need to keep the project manageable has limited the scope to childhood and adolescent memories.

Design Process

The landscapes chosen and the people and objects represented reflect the area I grew up in and my relationship with this area and my own biography. I am not tangata whenua (people of the land) as my parents were immigrants to this country, nevertheless I feel a strong connection to the King Country region in Aotearoa New Zealand and the geography of this area.

Memories are not laid down as a linear pathway but are rather layered and developed as building blocks of events and experiences (Sutton 317), so my adult brain is reconstructing my memories as different from actual events. My recollections may be based on certain experiences that are within events as more memorable than others due to other external events taking place in the periphery, now long forgotten. Rather than aiming for historical accuracy I have chosen a visual memoir style, involving both the memories and the emotions inherent in these memories to recreate scenes and impressions to create a mood which others are able to relate to as nostalgic resonance. I have also deliberately distorted some memories by layering artefacts from different photographs and combining the most nostalgic artefacts with participants from other photographs. Through this I have maximized opportunities for viewers to relate to the scenes and the people represented. The scenes and characters represented will be recognisable to a broad selection of viewers through the stylization, activities and scenery which locates these artefacts in twentieth century Aotearoa New Zealand.

Photographs and artefacts from my own biography were a starting point as was the use of parts of my 2020 fabric collection in which I investigated my relationship with textiles and pattern making practice through my family background. The scenes from my own biography are also artefacts that function as a shared Aotearoa New Zealand mid-twentieth century history in which many of us can reminisce about summers spent on beaches or

outdoors. The repetitive icons of jandals or cork soled shoes, and faces lit in harsh white sunlight anchor these artefacts in a time and place as do the garment styles chosen. The landscapes are created from memories and photographs from my childhood spent in the King Country province of the North Island but are also recognisable as Aotearoa New Zealand country images of rolling hills and earthy foregrounds, much like South Island alpine scenes are recognisable to inhabitants from all locations in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Colours, both in thread and in the fabrics used, have been chosen for their uniquely Aotearoa New Zealand quality or because they personally resonate with my biography. Earthy reds and browns and grey with an almost faded quality from our bright sunlight highlighted with fresh greens, and black represent our North Island landscapes and are also the colours which resonate with me personally. The stark white of the landscapes represents the unique brightness of light in Aotearoa New Zealand. Some artefacts have been tea-dyed to create a more nostalgic feel but all fabrics used are from my own or others personal fabric collections, or discarded fabrics donated by friends.

Many of my artefacts contain elements of slippage, an art term meaning an outcome different from expected, but beautiful in an unexpected way (Wynne-Jones). During construction I trialled ideas, and the results were not always as expected but usable in another image. Fabrics I dyed and covered in salt to create a sky and earth effect were put aside, but the old white duvet cover I had used to protect the table on which I laid the dyed work to dry became the sky in the applique landscape, and the background for one version of the embroidered girl in a handkerchief hem dress. Trials of screen prints carried out on waste fabric became the final image in the Pfaff sewing machine image. The opportunistic skill of being able to find value and make use of discards and mistakes is inherent in my practice and echoes the mid-twentieth century textiles practices of thrift and seeing value in discards. My artefacts work to raise the value of those practices above the lowly station of women's labour in the twentieth century. The tension between outcomes created using technology or textiles methods and processes, and how these outcomes are again reworked to create a final image is central to my own practice and relatable to many textile practitioners both from the past and in contemporary times. In the nineteenth and twentieth century textiles practitioners reused most scraps of fabric in some manner for thrift reasons but also to use and share skills in female communities (McLeod 6). Contemporary artist Carole Loeffler employs traditional methods in a contemporary setting to rework existing garments found in thrift stores (Loeffler

Carole) and textile artist Erica Van Zon writes of the process of using slippage to create new artefacts through the reworking of 'mistakes' (Wynne-Jones). In my own practice, due to my war generation mother who repurposed all scraps, it is natural to me to put mistakes and discards aside to re-assess later for use elsewhere.

In this project writing reflections initiated or became an important part of the process of making, the words on paper generating ideas which could then be translated to the artefacts.

Textiles and associated techniques have been employed as a medium for its unique place as a signifier of time and place, together with textiles' ephemeral and changing quality. The types of fabrics used, the prints, both existing or recreated represent the time in history of their creation, and the time spent on that creation.

Creating small intimate spaces for viewers' memories to be ignited reflects the intimate way that a garment will conform to a body which is unique to only textiles and tattoo. The depiction of clothing items has therefore been chosen to communicate aspects of the wearer's identity and is an ideal medium for communicating quiet memories of the past. This collection of artefacts is designed to create a portal for viewers to access their own memories and make connections to the role of textiles in women's history in Aotearoa New Zealand.

1. Garment of Infinite Promise

Key concepts: The relationship between the fantasy of designing a vision and the skills needed to bring that vision to life, highlighting the lack of value afforded to those skills.

My design process for the first group of works is based around memories of an early experience with textiles. I begin by examining what engagement with textiles meant and how this engagement manifested itself for me, as a six-year-old child.

A Lincoln toy sewing machine, given to me when I was six, was an entry into the world of technology. I had lost patience with the unreliable results of my hand-sewing in the

making of garments and this gift seemed to offer infinite promise just through its ability to create regular stitches at speed. The toy, but functional, machine represents my entry into technology aided design, and the relationship between textile practice and technology.

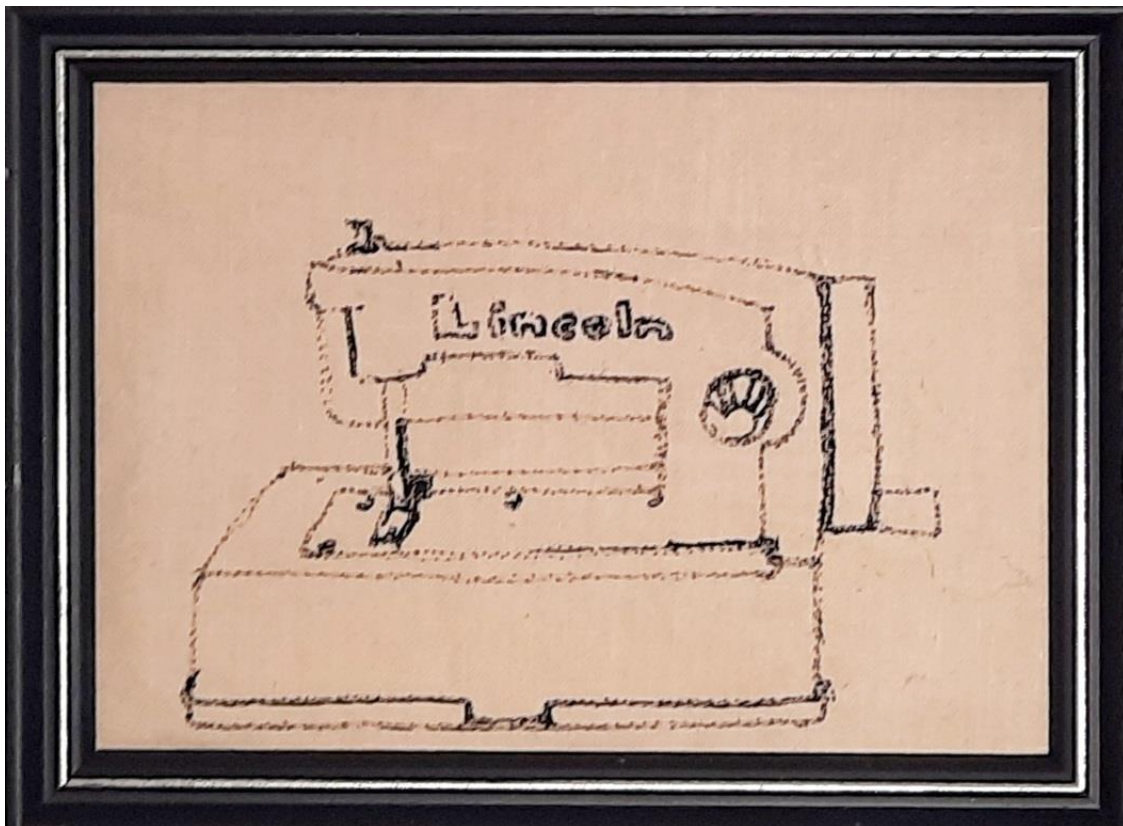


Fig. 5

Figure 5 is an embroidered screen-print of the Lincoln toy is nostalgic in its sepia-toned stitching and background and hangs as a portrait of a long-ago friend. Several iterations of this image were created using different techniques, the softer more childlike colours and texture chosen as the final.

The Garment of Infinite Promise was recreated from memory. The vintage fabric chosen was as near to what had been used for that first attempt. A silky feeling viscose, in a bright print of flowers, attractive to a young child.

Figure 6 and 7- Cut as a flat piece the garment shows a design without regard for the two-dimensional fabric and how it would cover a three-dimensional person, or doll. The unfinished seams and crude sewing show the haste for an outcome rather than focus on process or skill. Disappointment in the outcome is evident, the sadness of the collapsing words, but the garment failure also points to the lack of importance given to the skills needed to create such a garment successfully.

In this particular instance my process was led from memory and the Lincoln toy machine. I wrote about how empowered I had felt when I first saw this technology and the freedom it represented. Through my writing I recovered the memory of the first garment I had attempted. In imitating my six-year-old process, a flat pattern was made of the shape and the garment cut directly from that pattern. As an adult with pattern-making skills, I was aware of the likely outcome, so no trials were necessary.



Fig. 6 & 7

In *Dressmaking: how a clothing practice made girls in Aotearoa New Zealand, 1945 to 1965* Dinah Vincent discusses the lack of importance afforded to the dressmaking skills learned by girls at school in this era, and the positioning of this subject between home and domesticity and school. Further to this she discusses movies with well-known homemade clothes such as *Gone with the Wind* (Fleming) and *The Sound of Music* (Wise) and points to the omission of any actual dressmaking being shown, the message is about thrifty, practical women and their resourcefulness rather than celebrating the skills they used. In *Cinderella* (Geronimi, Jackson, Luske.) birds and mice make the first ball dress, and magic makes the second one, finding a dressmaker was not important in *Cinderella*. The heroine was assumed to have the skills needed, finding the time was the problem (Vincent 7–8). The Garment of Infinite Promise illustrates the tension between the promise inherent in beautiful fabric and the skills needed to manifest such a garment. Of course, my garment failed, I had the vision without the skills needed. The title of the garment reflects the irony that as a trained patternmaker I now know how to recreate that early failure.



Fig. 8

In Figure 8 the machine embroidered portrait of my mother uses the same fabric to recreate her dress, in the same way as the early garments I made were created from scraps of my mother's dressmaking. The image has a domestic setting and low perspective and was informed by an M.C. Escher woodcut because of its depiction of a Dutch domestic scene (M.C. Escher). The perspective in my image is deliberately childlike, the naivety of the image reflects my viewpoint, the focus is on the fabrics and textiles, the background full of the embroidered landscapes popular in mid-twentieth century homes.



Fig. 9

Figure 9 -The thread box is an everyday 'lower case' memento charged with nostalgia; informed by an actual thread box in my own collection.

The screen printed and embroidered image of my mother and me is a composite image from two photographs. It began as a simple image of the two characters highlighting the summer clothing and light. The bridge background was added for depth and to add an outdoors context. The colours, footwear, and light locate this image in mid-twentieth century Aotearoa New Zealand.



Fig. 10

2. The Garment of Just Beyond

The second group of artefacts relates to early adolescence. The starting point was the Pfaff sewing machine, an important memory object for my family. For my mother it represented a part of her identity as a dressmaker, something that was solely hers, with the skills to be passed down to me as her only daughter. For the rest of the family, it represented clothing repairs and the money generated by my mother taking on outwork to supplement the family income. In this, my mother's work was typical of the invisible labour of women in this era, household skills became economic necessities, but were not regarded as a career. Between my mother and I, the machine represented a private language as she taught me the intricacies of pattern work and sewing. This language and the transmission of knowledge from my mother to me was important to us both and took different forms such as direct instruction, working together on projects, or myself observing the repetitive tasks of the outwork garments she worked on. The spatial awareness and processing skills I was developing creating three-dimensional garments was enhanced by watching the finer details of how cuffs and collars were assembled—how and when they were attached in the

construction, and why those notches and nicks were necessary to balance the garment. I would help with clipping corners listening to music, the radio news on the hour would denote time passing for me and for my mother when to stop and begin other household chores.

The Pfaff machine was a symbol of our emotional connection and the garments and household items we created together became archives of our memories as a mother and daughter, and as a family. It also became a source of tension between my mother and me. For me it was the tool necessary to trial techniques and create the garments I was becoming increasingly adept at making. To my mother it was one of her few personal possessions and a source of necessary income and she became anxious about the time, wear and tear, and materials when I used the machine. The more independent I became in skills, the more she would worry about the machine. The artefacts in this group exclude my mother as I had become focused on myself as an adolescent and was becoming independent. The Pfaff sewing machine came to the forefront in layers of importance in my home to me.



Fig. 11 & 12

In figure 13 the apron is symbolic of my textiles learning in the Catholic school I attended when home economics was taught as valuable skills for either a future as a wife and mother, or as a garment worker in Aotearoa New Zealand's mid-twentieth century clothing factories. Although largely I enjoyed this class in which I could excel with the learning already gained from my mother, and my natural ability to sew straight, the strict adherence to following the order of the instruction sheets made me anxious and stifled my creativity. The outside of the garment is what we showed to the world, the letters AMDG embroidered on all our work meaning *All of my work is done for God*, the inside is an embroidered poem of how

I felt making it. The contrast between the two sides represents the growing distance between the relevance of the subject and my life in Aotearoa New Zealand.



Fig. 13

The Garment of Just Beyond is a handkerchief hem dress with a shirred bodice, a garment I was proud of making and repeated several times in different fabrics.

The shirring allowed me to make a garment which followed the curves of the female body I was developing while the full skirt fulfilled my not quite outgrown romantic attachment to fairy-tale ball dresses.



Fig. 14,15,16

Several iterations of this image using different technologies from screen print to machine embroidery were trialled. The sparseness of the final embroidered artefacts focuses on the fall of the garment with the jandals and feel of glaring sun, eliciting nostalgia for Aotearoa New Zealand high summer. The repetition of the image on different fabrics represents the different versions of this dress that I created, each one faster and better than the last one, with small changes. A skill had been learned and grown. The self-conscious posture is of an adolescent, not yet completely comfortable in her developing body.

The screen-printed and embroidered image of a collar pattern reduces the pattern piece to a simple shape and texture, unrecognisable except to those who have handled and used these patterns and understand the notches and grainline in the image.



Fig. 17

The screen-printed image on fine silk is of a sleeve pattern. The delicate printed pattern and the fine detail of the screen-print represent the advanced skills necessary to construct garments of this nature. The symbols, pattern language, and sleeve head shape are instantly recognisable to those who understand this language but are indecipherable to others through its complexity. These artefacts relate to the community of makers and crafters, often but not exclusively female who share a language hidden from others, and to the skills handed down quietly through generations.

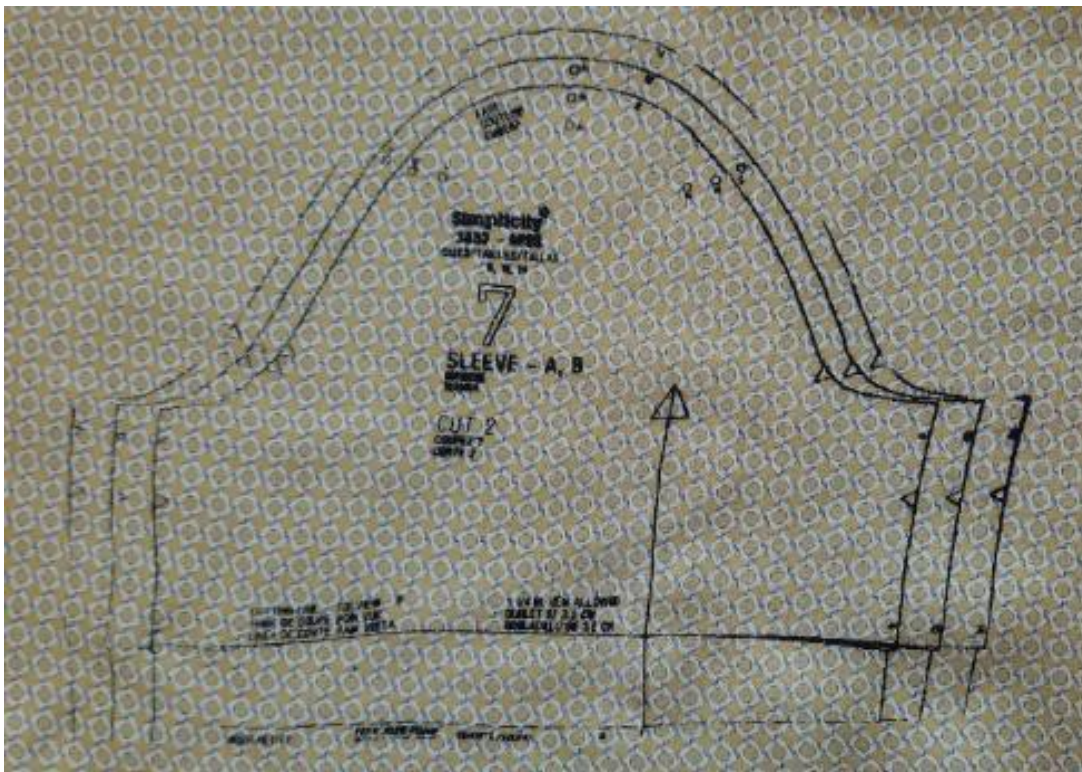


Fig.18

3. Go Outside and Play

The textiles landscapes relate to the King Country region where I grew up and to the wider concept of the outdoors for a child brought up in mid-twentieth century Aotearoa New Zealand. The colours and shapes create nostalgia in a viewer for a childhood they may have experienced or heard about. The artefacts were created from photographs or collage work and relate to the landscape being as integral to many Aotearoa New Zealanders as the garments they cover themselves with. The colour, feel, and smells surrounding us are part of us, as the buildings and structures we create become part of the landscape, much as a garment becomes imbued with the shape and smells of an owner.

Figures 19 and 20 are landscapes originated in a screen-printed image of slippage in fabric. Slippage in fabric is when fibres part unexpectedly after repeated abrasion or wear in a particular place. Slippage in fabric led me to slippage in art, and how unexpected outcomes can be more interesting and beautiful than the planned outcome. In landscapes this can be related to the unexpected beauty and patterns found in man-made structures like retaining walls or bridges.

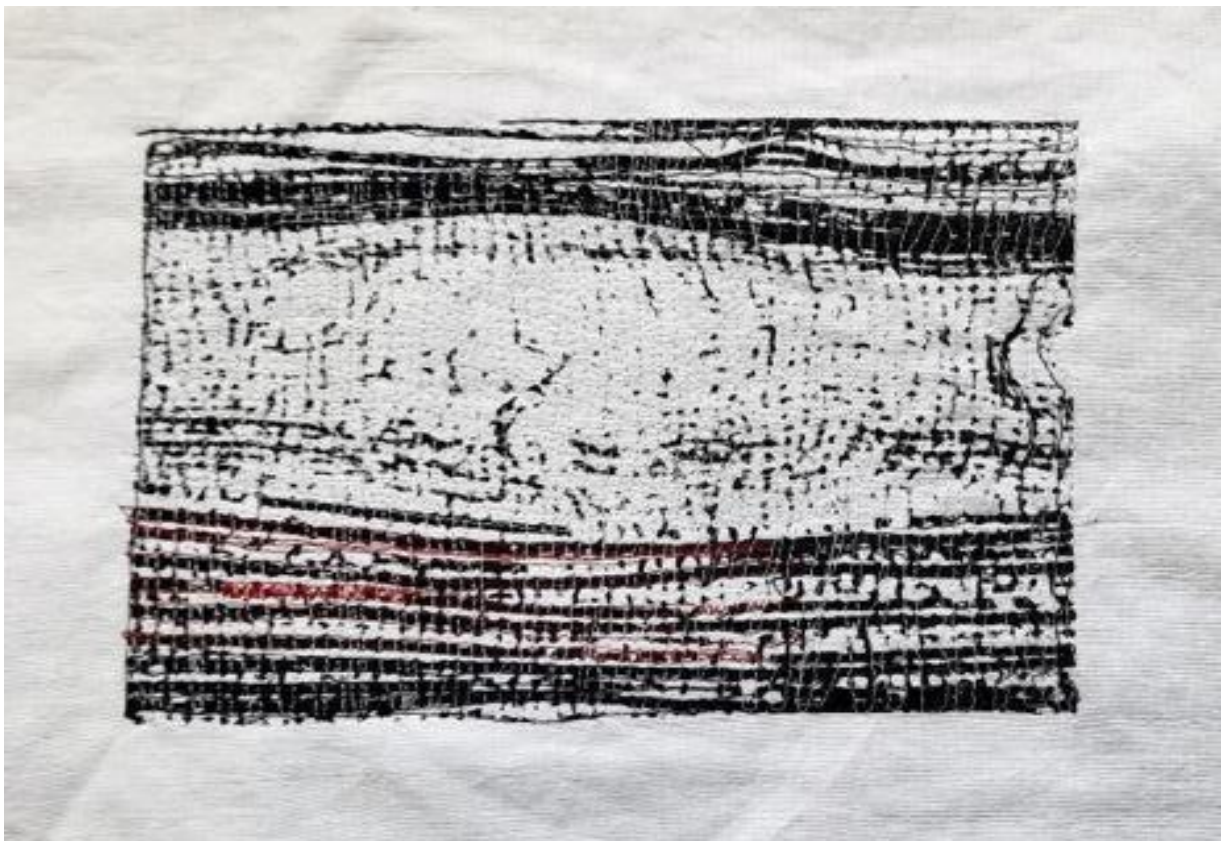


Fig. 19



Fig. 20

Figures 21 and 22 originate from a close-up sketch of weaving, a memory from early childhood of looking at fabric, which I first embroidered by sewing machine and hand, and then digitally embroidered. I was dissatisfied with the digital embroidery result but liked the mock-up image that the machine produced pre-embroidery. I screen-printed the image and embroidered it. My focus on opportunity, slippage, and the tension between technology and textiles in my practice is evident in these embroideries.

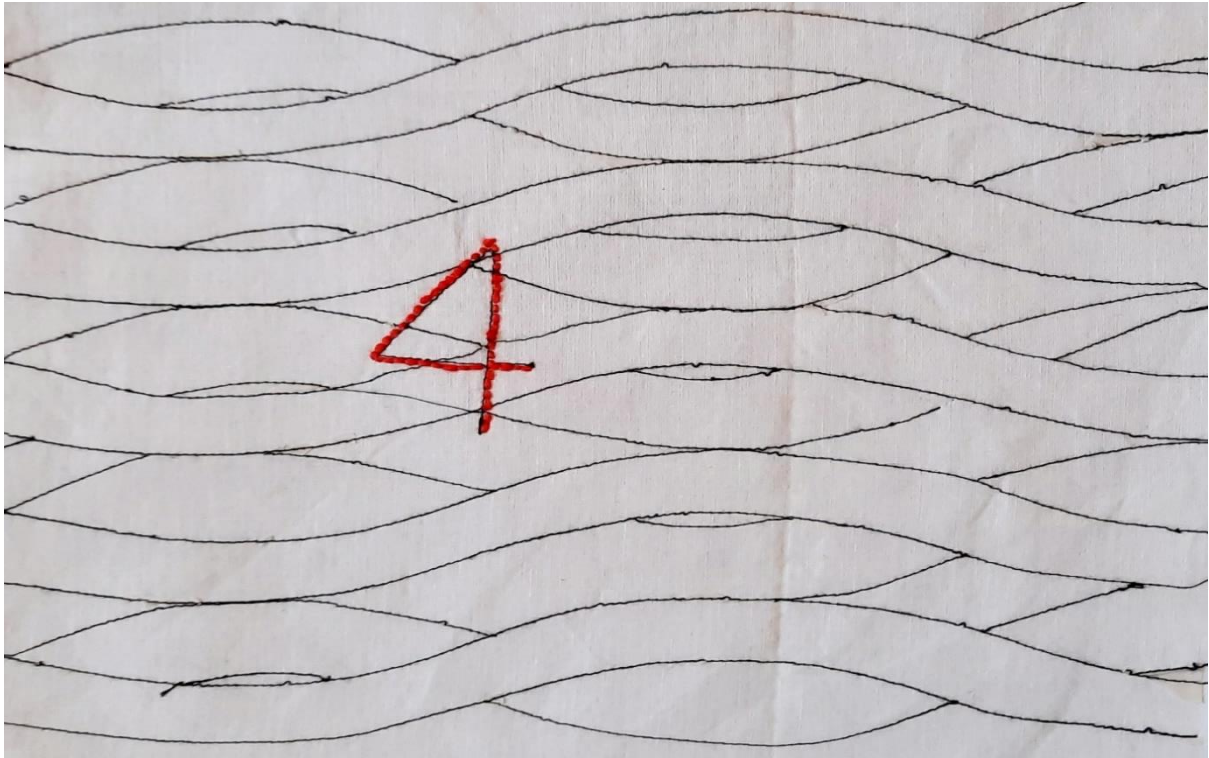


Fig.21

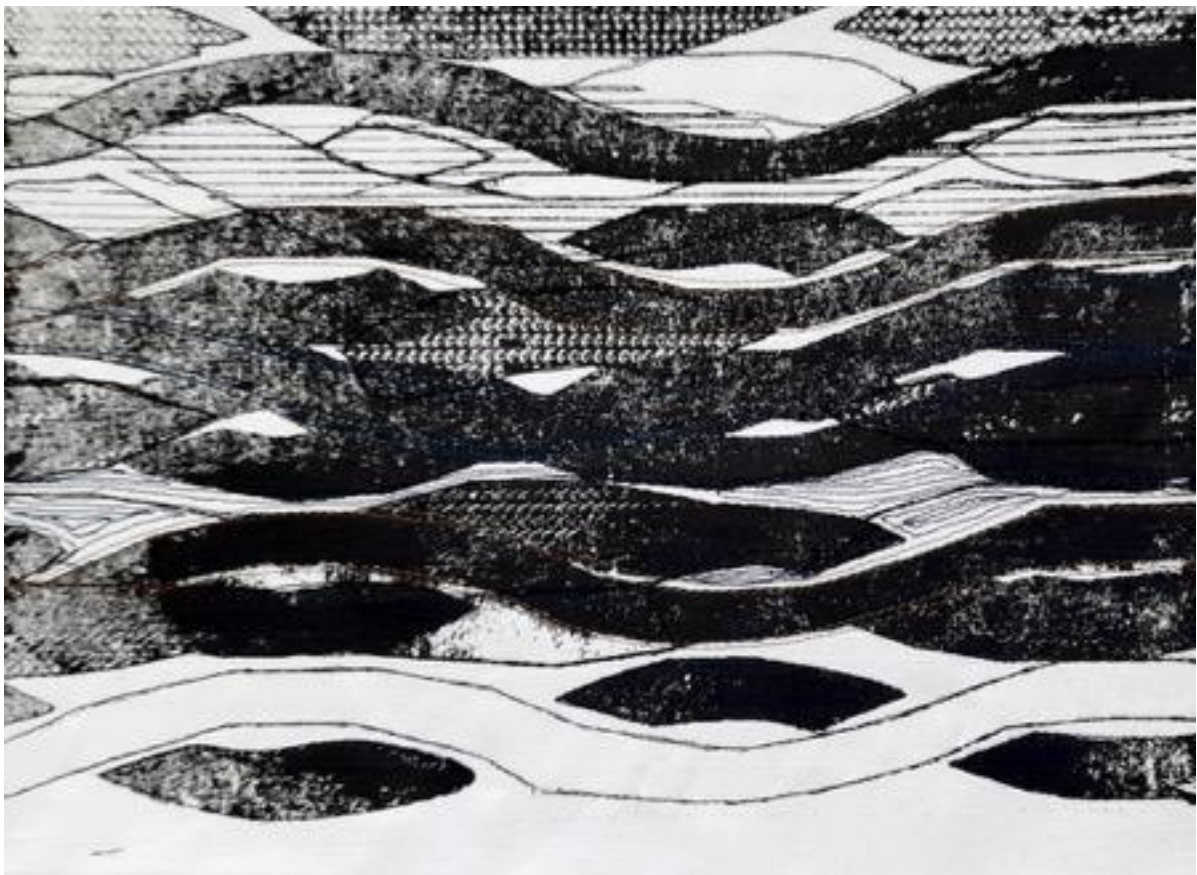


Fig. 22

Figure 23 grounds the viewer and ties the first artefacts to the rest of the artefacts through its earthy quality. The image is created from a Sara McIntyre photograph of the King

Country (Sara McIntyre) chosen for the colour, composition, and location, recreated through fabric appliques and dye-work.



Fig. 24

Chapter 2 - Literature and Context Review

A review of theoretical textile design, educational, and social history material was undertaken to form a position for my work and covers two interconnected main areas of technology education and the formation of personal and cultural identity for women in Aotearoa New Zealand.

This section covers the areas of public, social, and personal memory, its function and how it is formed, nostalgia and its role in memory, and how both nostalgia and memory around textiles practice can work to create identity.

Educational theories are examined around creating and strengthening identity through making objects, why this may have been discounted or undervalued in western culture and how craft practices affect well-being.

Part 1 - Female Identity and Aotearoa New Zealand History

Women in Aotearoa New Zealand in the early to mid-twentieth century, generally needed textiles skills to run their households, to make and mend clothing and reuse the fabrics when a garment is past using for its original purpose. To this end they were taught in schools to sew, use, or make patterns. The emphasis on this learning was thrift and economy, the hallmarks of being useful to a man as a wife in this era (Vincent 8), but I argue that many women also developed their own identity and history through these practices, a part of Aotearoa New Zealand history largely ignored in mainstream history books. This devaluing of women's history has caused the devaluing of the skills needed for these practices. Dinah Vincent in her 2018 thesis points to the history of teaching technological subjects in Aotearoa New Zealand in the 1960s as preparing boys for employment, but girls for domesticity, and a hangover of this is still apparent in many school policies surrounding teaching supply and positioning in academic pathways and career advice. Textiles as a subject, still, can be treated as a hobbyist subject, or as Vincent describes 'the sense that sewing sits somewhere between home and school' a subject that may be helpful in a later domestic life through the ability to carry out repairs and alterations on clothing. The devaluing of textiles learning has devalued women's roles in Aotearoa New Zealand history, and the value of learning through making.

This undervaluing of textiles skills is emphasized by a dominant historical perspective. Brewer, in *Microhistories* writes of his idea of 'prospect history'—a lofty birds-eye point of view of history in any sphere from dominant culture and contrasts this to 'refuge history' which is close-up and on the small scale. Refuge history narrows its focus to a singular place rather than a more global space and looks at particularities and details of that focus. "It depends upon the recognition that our understanding of what is seen depends on the incorporation of many points of view rather than the use of a single dominant perspective" (Brewer 4). In this view of history participants have agency, motives, feelings, and consciousness. Employing a more inclusive perspective provides a version of history in which all participants have agency and a voice.

A more inclusive view is particularly important when we consider the place of women in Aotearoa New Zealand's male dominated cultural history, Rosemary MacLeod in *Thrift to Fantasy* writes of an earlier generation of women in the 1930s to the 1950s who, in the name of thrift, unpicked, unravelled, and cut up used garments to reuse the materials through craft and dress-making practice, while their husbands worked to financially support the family, which was accepted as the more important role in that era. She asks whether these handcrafts of women were truly inferior to the culture of male enterprise, or rather a parallel culture that should be viewed as important and questions whether another function of these practices was to find the elusive happy ending they had all been taught would one day be their lot (Books 24). Textiles practice in this era acted as an important financial contribution to households and created communities in which the sharing of techniques, tools and fabrics enhanced the social fabric of the generation.

McLeod further examines the role of crafts in the duality of feminine existence—those women were expected to be physically hard-working but also to project an image of seemingly effortless thrift and resourcefulness to others. She points to the aprons worn by women of this generation who were, as she describes, their own labour-saving devices (Books 34). There were aprons for doing the hard physical work of the households, and other decorated ones for sitting with some handiwork after the chores had been done, maybe to receive visitors (McLeod 24). This duality of existence and need to create a separate visual identity for public view to the mundane reality of everyday life can be related to Susan Bishop's 2018 essay *Motivations for Private Collecting* in which women collect clothing which they will never or seldom wear. In her essay four women collectors of dress are interviewed to determine their motivation. The common thread is that some collectors are collecting for a life they have dreamed of, and not attained, or trying to complete something that is missing or may never happen in their own lives. What these collectors may be trying to complete is a model of physical self-perfection they are unable to attain or a lifestyle not within their reach. (Bishop 519). Their sense of identity and wellbeing is enhanced by their practice of collecting textiles artefacts which have been taken out of the realm of practical use and turned into a representation of a more perfect existence. Why choose clothing above other artefacts to act as this representation? It is natural to attach identity to textiles objects and garments. In my own biography, the reworking or making of garments had a profound effect on my developing identity. As a child I learned some of the skills which I associated

with the female line of my heritage and felt a connection to family members in The Netherlands I had never met. As an adolescent I could demonstrate the separation I was feeling from my family through dyeing existing clothes black, collecting thrift store clothing and fabrics and developing my own patterns for garments. The preference for black clothing and the collecting of vintage fabrics has remained a constant anchor to my identity throughout my life.

Textile artist Lesley Millar writes of how clothing and textile objects in our homes are imbued with the strains, stresses, stains, and smells of our personal lives in a physical and emotional sense. They become an archive of our most intimate life. Clothing is also another layer of skin or protection through which we can establish our sense of self and express our relationship with the external world while the fabric remorselessly records the evidence of those interactions. Clothing and furnishings hold the memory of our time and connects us to the stories of others (Lesley Millar 1).

The personal identity imbued into our clothing is easily identifiable, but in comparison, the structures that form a national identity are invisible, yet, have a strong bearing on the discarded history of women's textile practice. National identity in Aotearoa New Zealand is still heavily weighted towards the dominant white male settler model and much of the accepted version of history based on public and social memory reflects this phenomenon. Holly McQuillan begins her 2005 exegesis '*First Son-Memory and Myth, An Adjustment of Faith*' with describing memory as an ephemeral concept, that slips from grasp, is distorted and incomplete, and that it forms the basis of identity. We imbue objects, spaces, and buildings with memory and memory can be collated into objects which do not exist at the time of the event being remembered, such as memorial stones (McQuillan 1). Memory is both socially and personally constructed, and objectivity is impossible when the dominant cultures' versions of what and how events are remembered are given more importance than others. She discusses the still dominant male culture in Aotearoa New Zealand in the twentieth century, resulting from a recent colonial history which unbalanced the male/ female population ratio. Claudia Bell in '*Inventing New Zealand: Everyday Myths of Pakeha Identity*' includes statistics to show that in 1861 there were 622 women for every 1000 men in Aotearoa New Zealand. This resulted in the exclusion of women from a national identity and a massive disparity between the imagined national identity and the reality of experience (Bell 188–89). I argue that the devalued histories of women are equally important, and that

Aotearoa New Zealand national identity is shaped by their experiences. For many women, textile practice was central to the development and maintenance of both personal and communal identity through the pride in the skills used, the sharing of techniques and resources, and the expression of identity by the wearing of garments in which the fabric and style is personally chosen and created by a family member or oneself.

Textile artefacts stabilise personal identity more than other objects and the practice of making gives us a sense of individuality. Holly McQuillan writes our clothing leaves a far more intimate and personal history of our existence than other objects we may own. The memory of a person is more obvious in a worn coat or dress, the areas which may become more worn, the memory of shape, than in another household item such as a chair (McQuillan 14). Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in *History from Things* writes that our minds need external props to remember. He writes that artefacts help stabilise who we are. Dress tells us about the wearer's power and information about their social status. Objects can trigger a journey through time as mementos from the past and signposts for the future and provide concrete evidence of relationships and social networks. He believes that objects define the self, provide an opportunity for self-regulation, and in so doing help stabilise our identity (Lubar and Kingery 23).

Judy Attfield in *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life* writes that the intimate nature of textiles and their ability to change or be changed expresses a sense of memory or time. A child's first sense of other from itself is often a textiles blanket.

'The ability of textiles to age and change correlates to the flexibility of identity. It is part of our lives from cradle to the grave and may serve as a practical necessity in the sense that it provides cover or protection from the elements, but also comfort.' (Attfield 24).

Personal identity is strongly linked to textiles and textiles from the past can be read as history. The fact that women were the creators of most textile objects within domestic Aotearoa New Zealand homes points to an imbalance in how dominant cultures portray our national history.

Part 2 - Nostalgia and Memory

For women in the latter half of the 20th century, the creation of myth and identity and social history often expressed itself in textiles craft and dressmaking. These were subjects taught in school and shared from early teenage years through to married life and children. Textiles creativity was situated in gift giving, remembrances of those passed away, religious observances and thrift in the making of household clothes. Many of these artefacts are now valued as kitsch or vintage commodities but also function to connect us to the women who made them.

Celeste Olaquiaga's 1999 analysis of the meaning and purpose of kitsch is a lament at the commodification of memory and nostalgia although acknowledging its purpose for the creation of myth and identity. She writes that kitsch is the attempt to repossess the experience of intensity and immediacy through an object (Olaquiaga 291). Gen Packer, in 2007 deconstructs existing Aotearoa New Zealand kitsch and souvenir. Packer recreates it using more meaningful cultural motifs and emblems to reflect twenty-first century Aotearoa New Zealand culture more accurately, with the purpose of developing an emerging national identity that reflects more than watered-down emblems of indigeneity, nature, and geography (Packer 22). By 2013, Millar points to a desire for a meaningful shared history to create a collective identity (Lesley Millar 1). Sio-Atoa challenges the colonial appropriation of nostalgic kitsch motifs of the tropics as being far from the reality of those lands, a romanticized western view which ignores the lives and environment of inhabitants (Sio-Atoa 9). In MacLeod's *Thrift to Fantasy*, romanticised textiles artefacts from history in Aotearoa New Zealand both do and do not reflect the reality of women's existence in that time, with the women complicit in this duality. They have created their own myths and identity, but these remained unacknowledged in their own era.

Since the commodification of these textiles objects and the globalism of the textiles industry during the last fifty years, many of the skills involved in textiles craft have been lost, devalued, or marginalised. There is, however, a desire to connect to these times and skills as shown by the thriving vintage industry and outlets such as Drapers Fabrics and who sell fabrics as well as artfully arranged vintage-look patterns and dress-making tools (Drapers Fabrics).

The results of the global Covid pandemic, with its resultant delays, lack of merchandise available, and reductions in mass merchandising has emphasized a need, already highlighted through the planet's increasing environmental crisis, for people to reconnect with skills based around textiles, as a method to be able to repair, remake existing clothing but also for some as an economic need. They may face more uncertainty over ongoing income instability or suddenly have become a sole source of income in a family. Further to that, an emotional need to connect to a more stable past through traditional practices such as those involved with textiles may enhance well-being in uncertain times. Hallam and Hockey write 'One of the effects of mass merchandising in the later twentieth century is to underline the inherent ephemerality of the present', and through that 'set up a radically new relationship between wanting, remembering, being and buying' (Hallam and Hockey 18). Textile artist Carol Loeffler works with garments bought in thrift stores and reworked to create a narrative based on the imagined life of the unknown previous owner. She shows us the value placed on the broader connections to ancestors which can be found through textiles artefacts created in another era. In a world that is becoming increasingly unpredictable and futures unreliable, stronger connections to other generations may be sought to create a reliable personable narrative and consolidate identity. Loeffler connects with the 'spirit of her imagined foremothers' and gains solace and inspiration from their imagined lives, understood through the skills shown in their discards (Loeffler Carole).

The highlighted ephemerality of our relationships with the objects with which we surround ourselves in the twenty-first century, without the guarantee of instant replacement when we become bored, also points to a possible creation of a more meaningful relationship with those objects. How are they created? Can we create them ourselves? What do we value in a garment that we wear close to our skin and how does it bear relationships to family as a remembrance of those we may be separated from? My textile work celebrates garments worn and remembered from a different era, but which still bring comfort by bringing the wearer closer to me in present times. The practice of making a garment or object in textiles using the tools I have been familiar with for most of my life stabilizes my identity in uncertain times.

The focus on materials and how and who has made western mass-produced garments available, has already increased for environmental and social sustainability reasons, and this focus may become located in smaller community spheres due to the ongoing pandemic and increasing concern for our planet. The separations between family and uncertainty caused by

the pandemic may also create desire for more connections to ancestors and the past to stabilise who we are in the present.

Part 3 - Cultural Identity, Well-being, and Education

In my own biography, my learning in school was enhanced by my textiles learning in various ways. The early textiles learning from my mother which included demonstrations, independent supervised projects and collaborative and community projects we worked on together gave me a model of learning for myself I could apply to other areas. The acquiring of skills gave me a sense of identity and the collaborative and communal projects gave me a sense of belonging and value in the community. At secondary school the nature of textiles learning meant I was around tools and machinery I was familiar with and was working with the fabrics I loved. The communal nature of the textiles classroom and sharing of knowledge not only from the teacher but between learners gave me a sense of belonging and I made friends. As a secondary school educator, I create communal learning opportunities and see students develop potential and gain confidence through bonding and sharing knowledge.

As an educator with access to a textiles workroom I have also provided informal workshops for colleagues in which both the learning from each other and well-being aspects have been noted alongside the opportunities for creating deeper bonds between participants.

Groups of people working together in textiles projects has been found to address social issues such as loneliness, communication across age-groups, language-learning, and sharing in a community. In practitioners Amy Twigger-Holroyd and Emma Shercliff's 2012 research project '*Stitching Together: Ethical Dimensions and Innovative Approaches to Participatory Textile Making*', the focus of shared Textiles projects as cherishing people rather than the objects or outcomes created is discussed. In their qualitative research, the groups led were people oriented and focused on interactions and connections between participants both regarding their textiles projects and their own lives. In both shared and individual projects, communication across age, language, educational, and cultural barriers was measured. The nature of the textiles work required both repetitive work and short bursts of intense attention which allowed for lively conversations or silence, depending on the participants' needs at that point. This working either on a common project, or individual

projects together over several hours, with each practitioner having different strengths allowed for shifts in leadership in the group, trust in each other's expertise, and ongoing communication and friendships (Shercliff and Twigger Holroyd 6).

In Barbara Rogoff's theory of 'Learning by Observing and Pitching In, she describes communal learning observed in children in South America and asserts that the individual, the community, and learning cannot be analysed in isolation from each other. Rogoff argues that individuals are motivated by the desire to participate in the community to which they belong. The communities incorporating children into everyday activities, with the expectation that they would participate created the strongest learning environments. (Rogoff 24).

This method of knowledge transmission models the culturally responsive pedagogy on relationships envisioned in Te Kotahitanga prefacing the 2009 NCEA (New Zealand Certificate of Educational Achievement) overhaul and resulting in an enquiry into Māori achievement (Bishop et al. 5). The Te Kotahitanga model of teaching, created as culturally responsive towards Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand, is one that creates contexts where self-determining individuals work together to both share and construct new knowledge and in which knowledge and power is shared; learning is interactive and participants are connected to one another (Siope 3).

In Aotearoa New Zealand state secondary schools, particularly in low decile areas, Māori and Pasifika achievement is below that of other cohorts although improving possibly through the increased emphasis on cultural competency in teaching. The current NCEA review plans to address this further by incorporating Mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) into the broader curriculum.

Professor Russell Bishop, a Māori educator with over forty years' experience, questions whether the answers to the disparities in Māori educational achievement lie in the meaning-making and knowledge-generating processes marginalised by the dominant culture (Siope 3). Processes which involve communal projects and result in the making of artefacts rather than writing essays or solving equations are evident in formal education but are

regarded as lesser or easier. The lack of understanding of the subject-specific learning, underpinning technology as a subject, reinforces the value system of what is regarded as important learning in schools. Technology as a subject is compulsory in only year ten (fourteen to fifteen-year-old learners) currently in Aotearoa New Zealand secondary schools with what are regarded as core subjects such as English and Mathematics both compulsory until year twelve. The sense that students can discover whether technology as a subject is useful to them and discard it if not for NCEA reduces its importance next to core subjects.

The communal practice model that Bishop advises also echoes traditional and contemporary Māori craft and art practices. Mata Aho Collective is a contemporary collaboration between four Māori women who produce large scale fibre-based works, commenting on the complexity of Māori lives. The Collective's statement about their work is 'Our conceptual framework is founded within the contemporary realities of Mātauranga Māori. We produce works with a single collective authorship that are bigger than our individual capabilities and reflect community rather than individual endeavour' (Mata Aho, *Mata Aho - About*).

Mata Aho challenge many western ideas about how art or design is created and how it is exhibited, such as the assumption that it is created by one person, that it is presented as a finished piece and isolated from the community from which it came. Mata Aho celebrate collaboration as a collective expression of identity, and how this is fundamental to Māori identity. The skills needed to create their works are as important as the outcomes, and the rigour and care involved in creating as a group, working in union give their creations power. In their first exhibition in 2013, Te Whare Pora both traditional and contemporary materials are used. Twenty faux mink blankets, bought from the Warehouse are embroidered together in the gallery where it was exhibited, with the artists also eating and sleeping in the same space (Mata Aho, *Te Whare Pora*). The importance of how people relate, create, and present work together is the focus, drawing from the marae collective methods of creating, honouring humble skills and tools such as sewing and the sewing machine, considering space and exhibiting the skills alongside the outcome.

My own created artefacts, displayed as portraits, honour the collaborative learning with my mother, with the tools and skills highlighted in my biographical artefacts rather than

the outcomes. Because of the importance of the sewing machine in my home, I elevated this humble tool to a traditional place of remembrance. The image of my mother transferring skills to me and the focus on the garments and their production have been crucial to the paths in life I have chosen, so are deserving of remembrance.

Miriam Gibson in *Making Meaning: Informal Craft Communities as Sites of Learning and Identity Development*, discusses the concept of social constructivist activity to describe craft practitioners who come to a point of self-actualisation while transforming their world and as a natural result of their practice, collectively create their own life and nature, alongside their society and history. Situated in the field of adult learning, she examines why individuals choose to engage in non-credentialed learning outside of formal education institutions, and explores how the individual's sense of self is affected by participation in communal practice where activity is the mediating factor (Gibson 78). This resonates with Toi Māori craft practices and is important in the face of the post-modern fear of dehumanisation. Gibson asserts that humankind's increasing engagement with people and objects through virtual means, connecting through social media or viewing art or objects through platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest seem also to have caused an increasing need for sensual fulfillment in tactile engagement with materials and nature. The human need for balance results for many in a need to create as both a way to soothe ourselves and as stimulation as a panacea to an increasingly virtual world (Gibson 122).

Connected to dressmaking and textiles crafting skills and the reasons for collecting garments, is the practice of collecting fabrics or the notion of the 'fabric stash', a collection of thrift shop, craft fair, or fabric shop-bought lengths of fabric which may have had a purpose when bought but have since been relegated to the greater collection. Like the wearer/collectors of dress described in *Motivations for Private Collecting* (Bishop 518) the fabric collection is fluid, it may be added to, or used for projects, or lengths given away to others, creating social interaction, learning, and connections between participants, whether in actual physical interactions or via the internet.

My own fabric collection has been a source of both connection and inspiration to me in this Master's project. Connections to the textiles community allowed me to discuss and acquire fabrics from others. For the final embroidery of *The Garment of Just Beyond I* wanted a beige coloured linen background to emulate a style of wall art popular in the mid-

twentieth century and this was found in a colleagues scrap box. A tablecloth from my collection of vintage linen was used for another iteration of this embroidery. My personal ethos of buying as little new fabric as possible was able to be satisfied through my own and others' fabric collections.

Collecting textiles in differing forms and textiles practice offer strong connections within communities for the purposes of well-being, but also afford a portal to connecting with ancestors and other generations from more stable times. Memories and myths are created through the creation and collecting of textiles objects, possibly handed down through generations such as wedding and christening gowns, which strengthens communities through shared social history.

In *Making Meaning: Informal Craft Communities as Sites of Learning and Identity Development*, Gibson's key motivation to embark on her thesis was her frustration with the division between what is considered practical subjects in schools and what are considered academic learning and the assumptions and values assigned to both in formal education. This echoes the voices in the report prepared by Lynette O'Brien, Judie Alison, and Bronwyn Cross for the PPTA (Post Primary Teachers Association) to record the collective voice of technology teachers regarding the most recent major overhaul of NCEA (National Certificates of Educational Achievements) in 2009. The review of technology as a subject for the general curriculum review showed that technology teachers were viewed as having a lower status than other subjects perceived to be more academic, and the 2003 decision to abolish degree equivalency in teaching reinforced this by minimizing the importance of industry experience in teaching technical subjects (O'Brien et al. 9).

'Teachers who had been teaching for many years and were involved in, if not leading the implementation of the new curriculum, felt particularly disenfranchised in being told their qualifications were no longer good enough to access the top salary step' (O'Brien et al. 9). Most, if not all textiles teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand are women, which doesn't reflect the gender balance in the fashion or textiles industries. Around eighty percent of textile workers globally are women (Stokes 125) but in higher prestige and power positions such as fashion design, men are more well-represented. In Aotearoa New Zealand, men appear well-represented in the textiles industry as fashion designers and business leaders, likewise in secondary school teaching but few, if any, choose to become textiles teachers. This becomes

a gender issue through the low regard textiles as a teaching subject is held in by schools and policy makers, often resulting in high numbers of low-achieving students shepherded into textiles courses for 'easy credits' in secondary schools.

No data is available at this time regarding reviews of the latest NCEA curriculum currently being introduced into schools as this has been delayed by repeated lockdowns in 2020 and 2021. In my own experience as both a secondary school textiles teacher from 2013, and before that as a pattern-making tutor in a tertiary PTE (Private Training Institute), the subject in schools today is vast and muddled, with unclear expectations from administrators, faculty heads, and students. The positioning in schools within the technology learning area and generally as a smaller subject means teachers may often be drawn from other areas such as food or art to teach some, if not all textiles levels in a school, highlighting the lack of importance afforded to the subject. The differing backgrounds from either industry or as home-sewer/dressmakers, or even as artists mean that what is chosen to teach, the methods employed and the techniques themselves may be vastly different across schools which negatively impact on the efficacy of moderation and professional development. The strange pairing of food and textiles as teaching subjects is a hangover from the 2007 NCEA curriculum review, where home economics teachers suddenly found themselves teaching technology subjects, adds to the confusion (O'Brien et al. 9). Neither subject sits comfortably in the technology curriculum as the poorly written achievements standards (AS) for this area will attest to. Achievement standards are the NCEA tool for measuring levels of skill in learners. Many of the textiles AS have been clumsily adapted from the earlier NCEA of unit standards (US) in which learners were assessed merely on whether they were competent or not, and could either pass or fail. These unit standards gave no measure of the level of competency in learners so were seen as inadequate to assess academic levels of achievement. In technology the AS affords merit and excellence levels to higher level of skill shown and economy and efficiency in carrying out the skills, but no level of difficulty to what a teacher may ask for in the skill. The focus here on how a task is carried out rather than on depth of skills or academic rigour points to devaluing of both the academic learning and skills taught in technology, and the merits of the communal learning model are ignored.

Textiles in schools is seen as a university pathway, leading to degrees in fashion, textiles, and other areas of design, but the subject is often regarded as a low academic

pathway, more heavily populated by low achieving students. It holds the stigma of a vocational subject, suitable for futures as wives and mothers, or as a training for source of supplementary income in a household. A prevailing attitude in schools that Technology subjects are academically less challenging can cause university-bound students who are struggling, to be encouraged by school administrators to take a technology subject for 'easy credits', without understanding the skills and knowledge necessary to achieve.

In devaluing textiles teaching, the value of the skills which create identity and connections to others, alongside the teaching methods described in Te Kotahitanga, as being culturally responsive, are devalued. The skills needed in making meaning through the processes of making are viewed as less important than the skills needed to make meaning through writing.

O'Brien's report concludes that 'some (teachers) are disillusioned with the shift of emphasis away from the 'doing' side of technology to the academic process. The curriculum document requires students to have a reasonably high level of literacy and abstract thinking and teachers see this as hindering the development of technology as a subject that combines and values both practical and theoretical knowledge. (O'Brien et al.) which points to both the perceived higher value placed upon being able to write and conceptualize design, over the process of making and showing that conceptualization through the steps of the making.

Conclusion and Reflection

My own enduring personal engagement with textiles practice and the changing factors of time and place which affected my journey as a practitioner and educator were the catalysts leading to examining how and why textiles practice and education is devalued in Aotearoa New Zealand in 2022. The fact that textiles practice has been undervalued in Aotearoa New Zealand in the dominant culture's recording of our history, and that women's communities based around craft and dressmaking have been ignored or seen through a patriarchal lens has been evident in my research. In my practice, the elevation of simple tools to portrait status aims to restore the value of these objects in society and the focus on the textiles in other images raises textiles memory importance as one of the strongest portals to our family and ancestors.

Learners in domestic science textiles classes from the 1940s until the 1990s were mainly female in secondary schools and the subject was regarded more as training than education, situated somewhere between school and home life. The fact that the hangover from this is still evident in educational policy has been answered in my exegesis and I have asked the question, in the face of cheap imported mass-produced textiles objects and garments, why it is important that education in this subject continues and gains value in secondary schools. This is answered through my own experience. Through textiles I recreated early experiences to connect to my past in the King Country region and beneficial experiences of becoming a useful part of my family and the community. That individual and communal practice in textiles has stayed with me as a source of well-being and bonding with other practitioners throughout my life led me to examine how and why this occurs. Examining those early experiences with textiles and my own learning and teaching in the skills of dressmaking and patterns was a portal to exploring the concepts of educational engagement and learning. How and why people learn, the different opportunities for knowledge transmission and the benefits of communal learning became clearer through my research. That emotional engagement with learning is important and linked to identity formation and that varied transmission methods such as expert demonstrations, working together on a project, or independent supervised practice are beneficial became clear from examining my own learning. I have become a lifelong learner in textiles practice, and this forms a strong anchor to my identity and to my community. Although I also have deep interests in other learning areas such as literature and history, neither are as strong as my connection to textile practice as my initial emotional engagement to those areas was less strong. Whether the connection I have maintained with textiles practice is personal to me or whether textiles learning through close association to memory and identity formation should become more central to education is a question answered by others. The positive feedback I gained from the artefacts I showed to staff and students at the Master of Design Arohaehae sessions and personal feedback from colleagues showed my nostalgic artefacts were successful in taking viewers to a time when they experienced textiles in an emotional manner and had strong memories attached to these times.

That making meaning through making physical objects has positive effects on identity formation and emotional connectedness has been made clear through my own practice and through my literature review. Emotional connections and an identity of belonging to a

community are beneficial to learning which answers whether textiles and other practically based subjects should be more central and valued in secondary schools, particularly with the focus on Mātauranga Māori in the current NCEA review.

Reflection

The quiet skills of step by step, deciphering, and focusing on patterns is a quiet feminine energy. The promise of the evolving garment, the pauses to test, to trial, to iron fully involve the senses, as so the smells, the textures and the sounds of making. The anticipation and satisfaction as each step is completed, the assessing of fit, and the knowledge of correct threads and techniques are all valuable, and alive in a finished garment.

Image List

(All images are the author's own work.)

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