

An Embodied Dress Art Installation: Practice Based Research Into Place And Identity

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Introduction and background: There are many ways we view society, at times it is transparent and at other times, opaque. The transitions between absence and presence is a common theme in postmodern feminist theory as it is in my work. In context to society and the body I explore dress-art that draws on and contributes to, space, place and identity (see Hannigan, 2019). Engaging the methodology of arts-practice based research, a question that emerges in my practice is *What happens when we engage new materiality in our practices where we create artefacts from our body and embodied experiences about our socially constructed and socially presented bodies?* Some of the background and relevance to this research project is art and craft practices and images of my female ancestors. Growing up in New-Zealand alongside Maori Culture exposed me to the belief that ancestors maintain an ongoing connection. Therefore the idea of absence and presence for me is more about what is 'there' rather than 'not there' so the art and craft practices of my female ancestors has an influence on my practice today. Theirs was tidy, functional/wearable art - often knitted and crochet garments that reflected the societies and bodily-needs of their eras. Although I use some of these techniques and practices that my grandmothers have passed down, my art is in context to contemporary society, culture and new materiality.

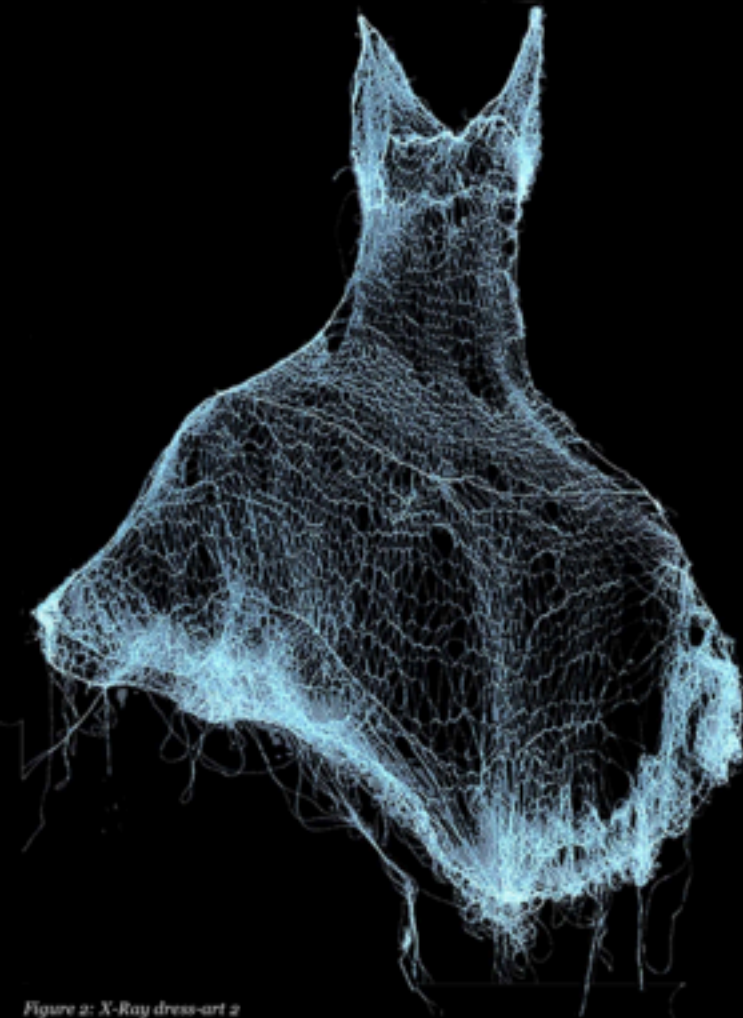


Figure 2: X-Ray dress-art 2

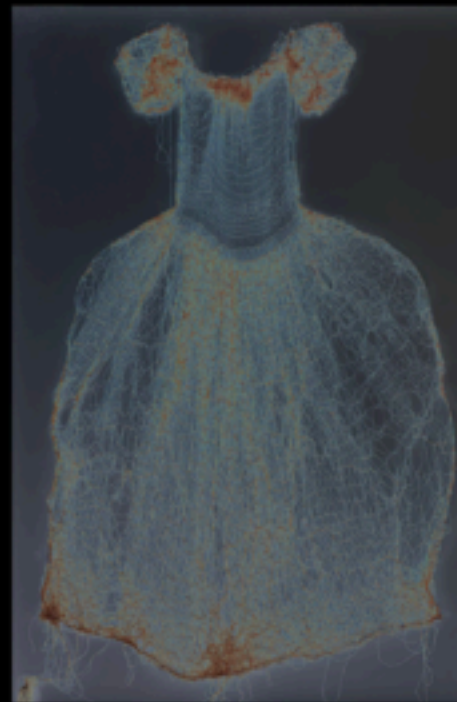


Figure 3: X-Ray dress-art 3

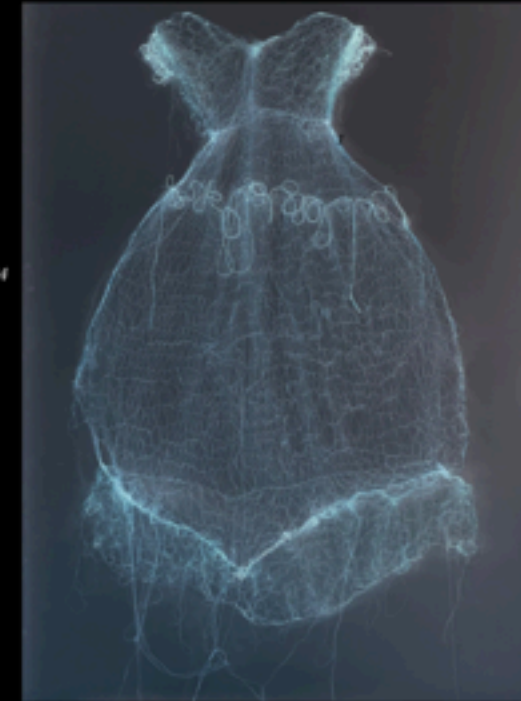


Figure 4: X-Ray dress-art 4

Summary: Metaphoric veils are explored in my depictions of the dress form in different times, places, practices and contexts. Rogue knitting un-wearable art without patterns to work from, is a way I express my embodied ways of knowing social, cultural and ancestral influences of the body and the body's form in my times and places. Initially knitted with copper threads, these dress-art forms represent the ochre and copper veined lands of Australia where some of my female ancestors have toiled and where I now call 'home'. When knitting these dress-forms my process was messy rogue knitting in different places and with my body (standing, sitting, walking, on trains). In this process, I expressed my own body, stylistic and aesthetic orientations as well as social and cultural influences. In 2020 I have developed these hand-made artefacts through digital photography processes (see Figures 1, 2 and 3) emphasizing qualities of line, tone, texture and exploring metaphors of the veil, depth and x-ray vision influenced by post-mortem photography from the Victorian Era. These digital works are printed on aluminium and other surfaces in a range of scales, to emphasise the light, blurs and effects of colour. The works capture how dresses cover the body's form and depict identity and persona for the wearer but the digital x-ray form of the works, shift the notion of *dress as surface covering informed by the body/social/cultural* to a *dress-x-ray*, conjuring up a sense of the deeper, unseen and hidden aspects of body and mind that clothing and other material forms (hair, make-up, clothing) mask or only partially reveal. My aim in showing these works is to highlight these deeper insights of the embodied and spiritual influences that are often expressed through the way we present ourselves and our bodies and how influences of society shape this.



The Arts in Society