

Lucy Brown

Lucy Brown's working title for her current emerging work is *Limbo*, another symptom of humanity's provisional plight and status. Brown uses the discarded clothing of the old – vintage undergarments, slips and petticoats, intimate materials in colours called 'rose' or 'mint' or even 'flesh' – to form the raw material of her tense, suspended, offerings. She's self-confessedly interested in the edges, the boundaries of the weave and of the clothing. Labels and stitched seams get reconfigured in her works and demonstrate the body selvages and sewn places where skin dustings lodge that are so evocative in Brown's work.



Lucy Brown, *Limbo* (detail), 2010

Cut, unpicked and ripped, the fabrics offer much less certain narratives than in, for example, Fisher and Haywood's pieces. Like Dwyer, Brown offers a puzzling, even abject, artistic vision that is less about *subject* and more about *affect*. This is particularly so as her work has moved slowly further from the representation of bodies towards more abstract spatial forms in which the body is nevertheless echoed. Consequently, as much as they "address narratives surrounding body, dress and identity", they leave a gap in the taut weft and the evocative warp which is sufficient for 'my human condition' to enter...

Essay by Dr Catherine Harper MA, FHEA, FRSA
Head of the School of Architecture and Design,
University of Brighton; UK Editor: *Textile: the Journal of
Cloth and Culture*; Editorial Board: *International Journal of
Fashion Design, Technology and Education*
January 2010

Rochester Art Gallery and Craft Case,
Medway Visitor Information Centre,
Ground Floor, 95 High Street, Rochester,
Kent ME1 1LX

More information:
Phone Medway Council's Arts Development
Team on **01634 338319**
email arts@medway.gov.uk
or visit www.medway.gov.uk/arts



Thread Bare

13 February 2010
> 25 April 2010



Rochester
art gallery
and craft case

Thread Bare has been conceived by the gallery's curators at Medway Council as a means of reflecting on concerns relating to "human condition and identity, social and domestic circumstances and cultural exploration through textiles"; and the works are promised as "playful and unsettling in their approach". These are large claims and universal themes, and the required mix of play and unsettlement adds further pressure to deliver a potent and affecting exhibition.

Judith Dwyer

Judith Dwyer's knitted and fabric *Dangerous Dolls and Dogs*, are the darkest and most disconcerting dolls and dogs I've encountered in some time. The luxurious dyed silk velvet and hand embroidery in sumptuous colours (witness her travels in Gujarat, India) contradict Dwyer's use of the detritus of consumer culture – the rubbish of aluminium cans, electrical wire, and computer components, and it's a perturbing mix. All the more so because of what she develops from those unlikely combined materials.

In his essay *The Uncanny* (1919), Freud proposes the uncanny as "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar". Arguably, Dwyer's works have more than a whiff of the *unheimlich* about them. They reference soft toys and reach out to their audience with all the charm and colour that soft toys do. But, unlike those referents, these creatures are uncomfortable, awkward, hunched and therefore troubling. Dwyer says, "They are not as cuddly as they first appear", but my first reading was that these are most uncomfortable creatures, and their affect on me was one of discomfort and a deliciously mesmerising disagreeableness.



Judith Dwyer, *Three Wise Birds*, 2010

Craig Fisher

Craig Fisher's work is often articulated through gendered language: Queerish masculinities, the 'women's work of sewing', machismo in low culture-sculpture, and these are all right and proper. What is more interesting, however, is to consider his works as 'supreme acts in futility'; representative of the impotency of violence, the abjection of disaster and limp idiocies of contemporary life. His shocking-pink scene-of-the-crime tapes and bollards, bloody fabric hand-prints on wall, soft sculpture discarded knives and guns are all readable as functional evidence of dysfunctional life. These are the scenarios on the news where drink has been taken, temperatures have spiked, catastrophe been unleashed and the unspeakable has flashed before us. And then we switch channels to *EastEnders*.

The banality of Fisher's project is at its heart. It reflects our conditioned gaping fascination and our actual lack of care. Like balloons some days after inflation, Fisher captures the de-tumescence of potency, the disappointment of decoration in the face of authority and the embarrassment of showing up in florals when charcoal grey is the dress code. This, as the exhibition's premise states, is about that rather diminished, flaky, but undeniably ardent state of (dis)grace we like to call 'the human condition'.

Joanne Haywood

Joanne Haywood's work takes up the human story through pieces that reach back into the faraway history of the Thames Valley and the exposed objects that come to light through mudlarking. Taking the clay pipes that speak in their materiality of the bones and shell that also archaeologically evidence London's history, Haywood is interested in the transitional, as seen through metal oxidation or the juxtaposing of skeletal metal and the fleshliness of textiles.

In her *Pipe Flower Neckpieces*, she builds onto the historical artifact something of the living textile, reminiscent of the loss of textile artifacts to water damage and time but also indicative of the re-inventive power of threads. Like Minta's missing brooch in Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*, (in)significant objects, especially those of desire sustain and prevail, and offer themselves unexpectedly from the past for our engagement and re-visitation.



Joanne Haywood, *Talisman Pectoral*, 2010