

6th Annual Australian Craft and Design Showcase



Barbara Veall

Crafty designs in sixth gallery showcase

Contemporary techniques and the handmade touch come together in Council's sixth annual Australian Craft and Design Showcase at Glen Eira City Council Gallery.

Opened on 2 April by Director of Craft Victoria Kevin Murray, the exhibition features 10 local and interstate artists' work in glass, ceramics, jewellery, textiles and metalcraft

ranging from the surreal to the sublime.

The collection of artworks blends traditional and non-traditional approaches: computers used to generate embroidery patterns, knitting needles transformed into jewellery, the ancient technique of repoussé brought to life in clean ensembles, the potter's wheel conjuring new forms for a modern age.

Exhibition curator David O'Halloran said the exhibition is curated with no set theme — artists' pieces range

from the more traditional to the more experimental and sculptural in an attempt to speak to a diverse audience.

"The artists selected present a variety of craft media with works that participate within the traditions of craft disciplines and works that ignore or challenge these traditions," he said.

"The idea is to create an exhibition that is both avant-garde and accessible. It pushes boundaries but also makes craft and design accessible."

South Yarra jeweller **Kathryn Wardill** uses a dynamic combination of glass

and metal in her exhibition pieces. The glass elements are made in one sitting while hot, and once cooled, cannot be remelted. *Peter Battaglione*

Vito Bila's clean and elegant designs are hand raised from a thin sheet of fine silver creating no joins or solders in their production, their simplicity of form contrasting starkly with the excessive, obsessive and rococo ceramics of **Janet Korakas**.

Internationally renowned ceramic artist **Victor Greenaway** captures the spiralling movement of the potter's wheel, using it to give definition and shape to his translucent porcelains and black-fired terra-cotta pieces.

The work performed cold on **Barbara Veall's** glass vessels has produced an almost wood grain type surface. The same organic and geometric presence is felt in **Lorinda Grant's** sculptural garments in very fine wool.



Janet Korakas



Gabriella Verstraeten



Kathryn Wardill

Fabric for the modern femme

by **Vida Mierendorff**

"My love of fabrics started early — I always made clothes for my dolls. I think they're still somewhere in my parents' attic!

"Both my mum and my grandmother used to love making matching dresses for me and my sister. Most of what we wore was handmade and matching — lovely pretty things with ribbons and bows and flowers."

Carnegie-based Showcase exhibitor Gabriella Verstraeten knew that textile design was in her blood by the time she took her first art class at secondary school. Now a textiles teacher and artist, she puts her love of colour, contrast and consistency to good use in her beautiful embroidered chiffon shawls. And now her work can be seen in the sixth annual Australian Craft and Design Showcase currently at Glen Eira City Council Gallery.

Using a combination of appliqué and machine embroidery on fine fabric, Ms Verstraeten adds life and movement to her pieces with coloured stitching, repeated patterns and motifs and beadwork.

"The machine embroidery is 'freehand' — I use the sewing machine like a pencil — and the stitching is

in different colours. My pieces are double-sided so I'm very conscious of the colours on the bobbin," she said.

"Colour is very important, possibly the most important element in design. It's what you notice first and respond to immediately. Whether it's when you walk into a room or it's the food on your plate, you notice colour and it sets the feel, emotion and attraction.

"I find colour contrasts very exciting. I try to attract people to my pieces by using contrasting colour schemes, and the decorative stitching on those schemes creates more contrast and interest. Hopefully others are also excited by this combining and contrasting of colours."

Working with a fine fabric such as chiffon creates its own difficulties, but the resulting texture created from overlaying the material with stitching and beading is both luxurious and sensual.

Chiffon is an extremely delicate fabric, and Ms Verstraeten's embroidery is fine — taking up to 12 hours per piece to complete.



Contrasting colours and textures — Gabriella Verstraeten with some of her creations.

Photo: Bernie Bickerton.

"You really have to handle fabric in a masterful way and this takes many years of practice," Ms Verstraeten said. "But the end result is worth it."

"I use repetition and pattern to follow the line of the fabric, and little handmade beaded tassels to weight it. The flowing fabric, luxurious colours, metallic threads, beadwork — it's all very seductive and sensual. People want to touch it and feel it, to

feel the contrast between the appliqué and chiffon.

"There are no real social messages in my pieces, no hidden meanings — it's all very decorative and flowing. There's something nice about wearing them. It's soft and feminine and exotic."

Craft and Design Showcase

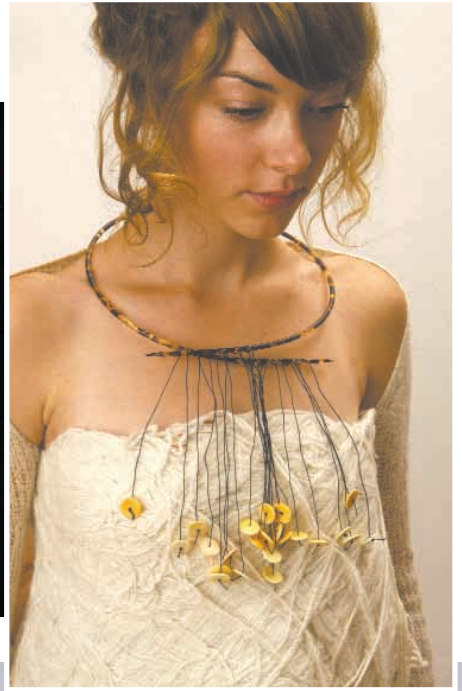
Based in Carnegie, **Gabriella Verstraeten** uses contemporary technology to bring age-old folk craft traditions to life in her sumptuous embroidered scarves and textiles.

Vanessa Samuel's graphic design background is clearly present in her elegant, judged jewellery work which uses recycled and organic materials, stainless steel, and traditional metals such as silver and gold. **Natalie Leonart** creates her bright, witty jewellery from discarded objects — knitting needles, sewing items, buttons, kitchen implements and plastic flowers.

Specialising in hand-thrown porcelain, **Peter Battaglione** uses the ambiguous nature of positive and negative geometric shapes to bring rhythm and movement to his unique pieces.

The Australian Craft and Design Showcase is open until 5pm on Sunday 27 April. Admission is free. Glen Eira City Council Gallery, corner Glen Eira and Hawthorn Roads, Caulfield. Hours: Monday–Friday 10am–5pm and Saturday–Sunday 1pm–5pm. Not open Good Friday.

Natalie Leonart



Vanessa Samuels



Lorinda Grant



Victor Greenaway



Vito Bila

Craft from the past brings new meaning to needlework

by **Vida Mierendorff**

The colourful contours and striking shapes of local artist Natalie Leonart's work first catch your eye, but it's the "second glance" factor that creates the most discussion.

Most of her pieces are created using knitting needles — but not in the usual sense. Instead of knitting with her needles, the Elsternwick-based artist melts and solders them to create her bright, playful jewellery pieces.

"I used to work with wood and precious and semi-precious metals to create my designs. Then I started working with perspex, and once I'd discovered plastic and colour there was no turning back," said Ms Leonart.

Knitting needles started to play a part when she came across a pair of anodised needles in a second-hand store.

"The colour and texture was just beautiful. I'll never use them for jewellery, but they made me look closer at knitting needles — the diversity of colour, types, heads, materials, and translucency. Once you start to collect them you notice the differences and the beauty of each one.



Natalie Leonart puts her passion for pre-loved needles to work in her Elsternwick studio.

Photo: Bernie Bickerton.

"I could buy them new but older plastics are nicer, denser. They're heavy, like working with dense wood and the newer plastics smell awful when you work with them."

"The older needles are made from Bakelite and you need to second-hand shop to find them. I enjoy the process — because they're used items you never know what you'll find. And it's a good excuse to shop!"

Knitting needles aren't the only materials Ms Leonart works with. Plastic flowers, plastic toy pieces and canisters from the 50s and 60s have all featured in her work. Her flower creations appear in summer in galleries and stores around Melbourne. However, it is her knitting needle creations which are currently on show at the sixth annual Australian Craft and Design Showcase at Glen Eira City Council Gallery.

"I'm happy to work with needles at the moment — the only limitation is the need to constantly use them in different ways."

While the supply of materials may be haphazard, working with "what you find" has added a new dimension to Leonart's design process.

"I used to draw the piece, then make a model, then make the work itself. Now I get inspiration from the materials themselves.

"More and more I want craft to be an experiment and playful — planning everything on paper first can restrict your creativity.

"Besides, ideas are born out of things stuffing up! You have an idea, then find out how to do it."

Leonart believes that people are losing their ability to craft or make their own items — useful, decorative or both.

"Crafting used to be a big part of people's lives. People knew how to sew or knit. You would see people on the train knitting on their way to work.

"I've always been into 'making', but my interest in working with knitting needles led to a revived interest in knitting as well. I started a knitting group with a group of friends last winter. We had our patterns and wool all ready to go and then discovered nobody knew how to cast on.

"Much crafting skill has been lost, despite craftspeople's best efforts. It's so important to keep those skills alive. Crafting makes you slow down — we're so busy and you need to take time out, to meditate and just 'make'.

"My grandmother once taught me to knit so there's a sentimentality to knitting and working with knitting needles for me. When I was a teenager it was so daggy, but now it's coming back into vogue. Or so they tell me!"