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**Staff Reference:** – 000327  
**FTE:** (e.g. 1.0)  
**FOR:** (1203)  
**Research master reference:** 2007000507  
**Level:** (B)  
**Status:** (Employed-fulltime)  
**Function:** (Teaching and Research)
Second Skin: new knitting/Creative Work

January to 3 February 2008

(250 words in total)

Background
Current publications and research have focused on knitting within a mostly traditional context, and address how designers have explored techniques of knitting, but not necessarily how they have pushed the boundaries regarding contemporary knitted outcomes and applications. This body of work explores how contemporary designers, artists and knitters can, and have push the traditional boundaries of knitting to create outcomes that explore new ideas, techniques and mixed media applications.

Contribution
This research and body of work, demonstrates how current perceptions of knitting, as viewed by the general public, has been challenged by contemporary designers and artists, through incorporating new materials and techniques of making. The work produced was designed to confront the viewer and allow them question the position of the work as fashion or art, and challenge the perception of social constructs regarding knittings’ identity and historical positioning.

Significance
The significance of this work is that it demonstrates how knitting can be deconstructed, but through still utilising traditional techniques and combining them with new materials. The research and creative design work component has been essential insofar as the insight it has provided and the new knowledge it has created such as establishing the perception of how knitting in a traditional and contemporary framework is perceived. The use of the knowledge gained through researching traditional knitting styles, such as Aran knitting became an essential technique to explore, with the textural and symbolic qualities providing an exceptional background that could be adapted in relation to the design concept, scarification.
SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

(Press, invitations, reviews, photographs of exhibitions/installations/artworks etc. Evidence of public exposure of work.)


Catalogue cover & pages 2, 3 & 4:
Second skin: new knitting
Alana Clifton-Cunningham
30 January - 2 February 2008
Knitting is a form of constructed textiles that has the ability to be manipulated and moulded into two and three dimensional forms. It can be patterned and manipulated through the knitting/making process and has versatility that makes it highly unique. This body of work primarily uses knitting as a medium to create knitted forms that wrap, cocoon and in some circumstances distort the body.

This research has explored and questioned the concept of contemporary knitting as fashion or art, and interrogates the notion of ‘deconstruction’ by looking past the traditional knitted coverings for the body. Using knitting as the main medium to create this series of ‘body pieces’, each piece incorporated elements of mixed media that explore materials and design principles that are juxtapositions to one another, such as hard and soft, rough and smooth, mass and gradation. Additional materials and process of construction include laser cutting and etching of Tasmanian oak veneer and leather, silk organza and semi precious stones. The pieces created are concerned with interaction between traditional and contemporary knitting techniques, and questions the relationship of the knitting to the human body as a form of second skin.

As design inspiration this work focuses on body adornment and patterning, literally and as a metaphor. Body scarification is a language that is inscribed into the surface of the skin on the body with ‘tribal marks’ having a diversity of cultural and symbolic significance such as; beauty, pain, identity, sorrow, gender and status. Inscribing in some cultural tribes signifies
a ‘rite of passage’ such as sexual expression or a passage from childhood to adulthood and social acceptance, which is eminently symbolic. Other forms of scarification are created to serve the purpose of tribal identification, some from metamorphic allegory and supernatural reasons such as protection and comfort, and others for pure aesthetic intention.

Within this work, I am attracted to the idea of celebrating something that is generally misunderstood because of popular western misconceptions and negative connotations. Primitive body scarring has often been described or thought of as crude and grotesque, but these body manipulations have significant meanings that range beyond aesthetics. In contrast to these negative images shaped by common perceptions, I find the practice of body scarification with the layers of meaning attached to be particularly intriguing and beautiful, with the delicate nature of the skin, the scars formed create a juxtaposition in that they are hard and protuberance. Against the backdrop, being the skin, which shows signs of who we are, weathered and aging through folds and creases on the surface, the scars are relatively prominent in contrast. This reflectivity is the foremost motivation for the fabrication preference and also the form and silhouette the pieces have taken.


* machine knitted

* hand knitted

Knitted knits, pattern and photography: Asha Elting, Cunningham

Model: Emma Burton
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for their continued support:

David Cunningham, Faye Coli and Jodie Clifton

From the University of New South Wales, College of Fine Arts, Liz Williamson and Wendy Parker.

From the University of Technology, Sydney, Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building, the fashion and textile design team - Allison Gwill, Eric Hagen, Cecilia Heffer, Val Horridge, Phil Inwood, Dr Volker Karaminas, Milena Raltkova and Associate Professor Douglas Tomkin (Head of School - Design).

Many thanks to Liz Gemmell, Veena Collins and Cathy Lockhart for their enthusiastic support and the many conversations about knitting, and also to everyone that helped with this research project. Thank you to Faye Coli for her hand knitting expertise.

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ISBN 978-0-646-45841-6

This exhibition is part of the Postgraduate Summer Program at Ivan Dougherty Gallery, College of Fine Arts, The University of New South Wales, Australia.

IVAN DOUGHERTY GALLERY
Postgraduate Summer Program

Alana Clifton-Cunningham

Alana is a fulltime Lecturer at the University of Technology, Sydney, Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building in Fashion and Textiles.

Recent research papers and exhibitions include:

2007, International Hand and Lock Embroidery Competition (finalist)

2006, "The Space an investigation of the sock in society", conference paper, York University, Toronto, Canada

2004, "Tramp coat: an investigation of traditional and digital textile applications in the creation of fusion", published conference paper at "The space between art, fashion, textiles and design", Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia

2006 Sydney Exhibition, Customs House, Sydney (media exhibition of united work)

2005 "Blending the boundaries: fashion design innovation in contemporary textiles", International textile exhibiton, Fairfield Gallery, Sydney

2005, "Knitting (group exhibition), Kudos Gallery, Paddington.

Forthcoming - Fragments: methodologies of making (April 2005 - co-curated with maker Allison Gwill), IAV

LAB Gallery, University of Technology, Sydney
IMAGES OF EXHIBITION / WORK
Ivan Dougherty Gallery installation shot
Work presented in the exhibition at the Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Paddington: A Clifton Cunningham (2008)
Work presented in the exhibition at the Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Paddington: A Clifton Cunningham(2008)