The Black Swan and Postnatal Depression:
preventive talismans and transformative garments for ‘bad’ mothers

An Appropriate Durable Record
submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Masters by Research

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DECLARATION

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the candidate alone.

The work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award.

The content to the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program.

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Ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Danielle Jacie Hobbs

March, 2013
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PROJECT PROPOSAL
In the centuries-old fairy tale of the Swan Maiden, a man sees a white swan shed her feathered robe to bathe, revealing a beautiful maiden. He steals the enchanted garment preventing the Swan Maiden from flying away so she will marry him and bear his children. The children eventually give away the robe’s hiding place, enabling the Swan Maiden to transform again into her swan shape and flee, leaving her husband and children behind. This, and other Animal Wife narratives such as Selkie, The Dove Girl and Donkeyskin, are examples of fairy tales featuring transformation in which the animal becomes a wife or the woman avoids becoming a wife through disguising herself as an animal, often through the agency of an enchanted garment or animal skin. The Swan Maiden’s desire to escape the demands and responsibilities of marriage and motherhood sees the Animal Wife motif serve as a metaphor for ‘aberrant’ woman or - of specific relevance to this project - reluctant, negligent or ‘bad’ motherhood.

1 The Aarne–Thompson Classification System groups fairy tale types. The Swan Maiden is an Animal Wife, motif number 400. Other Animal Wife motifs are found across cultures, in Italy she is a dove, in Scotland she is a Selkie (sea), in Croatia she is a she-wolf, in parts of Africa she is a buffalo.
From the beginnings of civilisation, words for a ‘mother’ were embedded into languages. But the word ‘motherhood’ - referring to the qualities or spirit of being a mother, only entered the English vernacular at the turn of the 17th century. Since its inception, the terms and conditions of motherhood have been regularly redefined by Western cultures, as women’s access to social security and healthcare, land ownership and equal pay among other things, have changed over the centuries.

I will be constructing a body of artworks that explore the underlying ideologies of motherhood (values, beliefs and sets of meanings) that construct the identity of being a mother in Western culture. However, in contrast to the dominant image of woman as instinctive nurturer and natural mother (fig. 3) - personified in its most extreme form in the iconography of the Madonna and Child (fig. 2) - I will be examining the pressures such unrealistic role models exert on mothers who do not conform to social ideals of motherhood. In particular, I will be focusing on motherhood suffering the added burden of Postnatal Depression, a condition affecting upwards of 15% of Australian women. Symptoms can include feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness and believing that one is a failure as a mother. These can alternate with feelings of extreme anger, resentfulness or irritability, resulting in guilt or shame in women who had expected to be extremely happy and fulfilled by the birth of a child. Such feelings of failure are amplified in the face of the idealised, idyllic and celebratory motherhood one is constantly exposed to in advertising and popular media.

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Myths and fairy tales present some of the few spaces in which the darker aspects of motherhood are openly given voice, while the shape-shifting that occurs within these stories suggests the possibility of splitting our conflicted selves, or transforming from ‘bad’ to ‘good’ and vice versa. English writer Nicholas Royle theorises that the uncanny has to do with a sense of “self as double, split or at odds with ourselves”. This can be likened to the Animal Wife narrative in which the animal persona exists in conflict with her human persona. Key to these narratives is the presence of a garment or charm with shamanistic powers to transport or transform the wearer between states of being, acting as a conduit between binary opposites of the self.

In this research project I will explore ideologies of motherhood and the contradictions and complexities of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ motherhood. I will draw on my firsthand experience of Postnatal Depression and the inherent binaries of Animal Wife narratives - in particular the Black Swan motif - focusing on the fluid, transformative spaces between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ motherhood. The project will be realised through the creation of garments that suggest escape through transformation, and talismans, amulets and charms that embody the dual purposes of watching over the child in the mother’s absence and shielding the child from the ‘bad’ mother’s presence. I will be exploring the role that psychologically loaded materials such as hair, fingernails, bones

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and feathers can play in imparting shamanistic resonances onto garments and talismans, thereby amplifying allusions to transformation, and the role of photography in contextualising and activating such garments and talismans.

**Background**

The tale of the Swan Maiden goes back centuries, appearing in differing forms in both Eastern and Western literature with the white swan symbolising the epitome of feminine virtue. Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky’s ballet Swan Lake (fig. 6) expands on the tale of the Swan Maiden, with the Russian composer requiring his lead ballerina to inhabit two roles, the virtuous white swan Odette and her conspiring antithesis Odile, the black swan. David Aronofsky’s 2010 film The Black Swan (fig. 9) explores the psychological conflict that plagues Prima Ballerina Nina - a ‘natural’ Odette - as she is pushed to plumb the darkest corners of herself in order to access the necessary wickedness for Odile. Aronofsky perpetuates archetypes of femininity through pitting Nina’s ‘good’ white swan self (fig. 7) against her ‘bad’ black swan self (fig. 8).

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In Nassim Nicholas Taleb’s exploration of probability The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable (fig.10), the native Australian bird serves as a metaphor for previously unimaginable phenomena that can retrospectively be rationalised with hindsight. The metaphor developed out of a maxim by Roman satirist Juvenal, who wrote in 82AD that a perfect wife is a “rare bird… very like a black swan”. For centuries the black swan existed in the European imagination as a metaphor for the impossible or that which did not exist. Prior to the late 17th century, European experience of swans suggested that they were an exclusively white bird. By equating an ideal wife, and by extension mother, with an ‘impossible’ black swan, Juvenal implied that the former was as unlikely as the latter. When, in 1697, a Dutch expedition to Australia discovered two black swans at the mouth of a river, preconceived ideas of the swan as an exclusively white bird were turned on their heads. The existence of black swans was subsequently rationalised as having always been possible after all, forcing a re-examination of the very notion of the swan. In an example of unfortunate serendipity, when I was starting out on this project, youths stoned a black swan to death in Moonee Ponds as she was nesting. The swan’s refusal to abandon her single egg at the cost of her life epitomises the idealised archetype of the ‘good’ mother, refuting centuries old superstitions surrounding black animals as inherently evil. In this instance the biological ‘rare bird’ - the black swan - also embodied its metaphorical equivalent, the perfect wife/mother.

11 Rara avis in terris nigroque simillima cycno (Juvenal 82AD 6.165) Translation: a rare bird in the lands and very like a black swan.
13 Ibid. p. 82.
15 In Macbeth, Shakespear sees the Raven as the herald of misfortune, in the middle ages in Europe black cats were believed to be witches’ familiars, vampire bats are associated with Dracula and other fictitious bloodsucking monsters, depression was referred to by Winston Churchill as a black dog.
Fairy tales have a long history of constructing archetypes of good and evil motherhood through the various guises of Queen, fairy godmother, malevolent stepmother, witch and crone. Contemporary media culture continues to use these archetypes to frame their stories. American Elisa Baker (fig. 11) is depicted in American and Australian media as the jealous and ugly stepmother, facing up to 30 years in jail for the murder of her 10 year old, disabled Australian stepdaughter Zahra Baker.

Australian Lindy Chamberlain (fig. 12), whose daughter Azaria disappeared from the family’s tent at Ayres Rock (Uluru) in August 1980\(^{16}\) and UK’s Kate McCann (fig. 13), whose daughter Madeline disappeared from the family’s holiday villa in Portugal in May 2007,\(^{17}\) were also depicted by global media as infanticidal Medea’s.


Both women were assumed guilty of, at worst, murdering their own child or at best being a negligent mother, with Postnatal Depression being touted as a contributing factor in both cases. Driven by my own dark secret of ‘bad’ motherhood I started to collect news articles about parents, particularly mothers, who harmed, neglected, or committed infanticide on their own children. In hindsight I understand that I was searching for reassurance that I wasn’t indeed that bad. I began to wonder whether I might also use the cultural complexities and contradictions surrounding the black swan as a vehicle for exploring the fluid spaces between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ motherhood, and thereby challenge conventional binaries and archetypes by allowing for the possibility of a ‘good enough’ mother.

Review of Literature and Current Practice

In 2004 art historian, curator, and Kunsthalle Bielefeld Museum director Thomas Kellein began working with Louise Bourgeois on her exhibition La Famille. The exhibition included the Femme Maison series (fig.14) drawing from her experience as housewife and mother in the post war years when she was raising her young family in New York. In the accompanying catalogue Kellein writes that


19 Donald Woods Winnicott was a mid-twentieth century English paediatrician, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who coined the term “the good enough mother”. To Winnicott, the concept of the perfect or ideal mother was not only unrealistic but also undesirable. Just as the mother who is also a virgin is the stuff of myth or faith, the mother who denies her feelings of ambivalence at times or feels a need to be “the best” will inevitably fail and could most possibly pass that sense of failure onto the child. Ana. Newbold, ‘Picturing Mother and Child’, Inkblot [webpage], (2011) <http://inkblotreview.blogspot.com/2011/03/picturing-mother-and-child.html> accessed 05 October 2011.

“she is a woman who loved her husband, then wrestled her freedom from him, all the while experiencing her inner solitude as depression, her children as a joy and then as a burden, her home as a font of freedom, as a prison and as a constructed world”.21

Bourgeois was familiar with the dichotomy of the mother/artist struggle and made works throughout her career depicting the ‘bad’ mother, including the small ink drawing of a Chronos like figure devouring her child (fig. 15). When questioned about this work Bourgeois replied, “I want to abolish them ... because they are such a burden. The only way of making them disappear is to eat them, the way spies during the war used to get rid of evidence by swallowing it.”22 It is worth mentioning that the majority of the early drawings and paintings concerning Bourgeois’ role as a mother were not widely viewed, published or written about at any length until she was well into her nineties. Why would such an openly self-referential artist archive such a large component of her work?

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A scan of psychological and sociological literature such as the Journal of Marriage and Family, Journal of Sociology, Journal of Feminist Family Therapy and Journal of Career Development reveal numerous articles about the realities of motherhood. Likewise, countless books including The Myths of Motherhood, Inventing Motherhood, A Woman Born, and Same Difference serve to contextualise first person experience of motherhood within the broader parameters of politics, feminism, women’s studies, literature, music, film and television, theatre and philosophy. This suggests that motherhood has been a comprehensively researched subject and yet, as American poet Alicia Ostriker points out, the great universal subjects of art may well be love, sex and death but that ‘pregnancy and birth remain taboo’. What happens after birth – motherhood – is worse than taboo, it is simply pedestrian.

A number of artists, notably photographers, have endeavoured to make artwork about the maternal experience, however in most instances the camera has been turned on the child/ren. American Sally Mann’s 1992 book Immediate Family records her three children over an eight-year period (fig. 16). Compatriot Julie Blackmon’s Domestic Vacations (2008-2012) captures a “Jan Steen household” in disarray, teeming with rowdy children and boisterous family gatherings (fig. 17). New Zealander Anne Noble’s Ruby’s Room (1998-2006) (fig. 18) documents some of the things children do with their mouths in daily life.

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28 The Dutch proverb ‘a Jan Steen household’ originated in the 17th century, named after Dutchman Jan Steen’s bustling paintings and is used to refer to a home in disarray, full of rowdy children and boisterous family gatherings.
29 There are inspiring men who have made photographic series about family life, though with less likelihood of being pigeon-holed, my favourite being Emmet Gowin’s photographs of family in Danville, Virginia taken between 1966 and 1975, Robert Frank’s images created after the death of his daughter in 1971 and up until his son’s death in 1995.
It has been difficult to locate any work about the impact of motherhood on the mother, one of the few exceptions being Australian photographer Toni Wilkinson’s series’ M/Other (2009). Child and adolescent psychiatrist Dr Dawn Barker says of Wilkinson’s work, that it “challenges the stereotyped images of mothers as stable foundations: [Wilkinson’s] mothers show awkwardness, detachment, and uncertainty; her children show distress, anger and ambivalence.” Wilkinson’s M/Other #7 (fig.19) shows a woman standing in an acidic yellow glow in the centre of a darkened room. One arm holds a baby to her breast, the other hangs limp. Though she is breast-feeding, the scene is devoid of nurture, comfort or warmth.

30 Late in my research I also discovered the work of Australian Sophia Xeros-Constantinides, in particular The Bittersweet Embrace of Motherhood. Xeros-Constantinides is an artist and clinician working with perinatal mother-infant distress. She is currently undertaking research for a PhD in Fine Art at Monash University, exploring the visualisation of women’s reproductive experiences and the maternal-infant relationship. Sophia Xeros-Constantinides, et al., Bedlam: The Bittersweet Embrace of Motherhood, 2010, Template Publishing, Melbourne, 2010, p. 1.

She wears $2 Kmart undies, the kind that will be thrown away after the first few weeks of wear, stained with blood, afterbirth and urine. The bewilderment expressed by Wilkinson's subjects is suggestive of maternal mental illness, her mothers often seeming emotionally detached, isolated, marginalised. It is the need to negotiate or escape this psychological space that I will grapple with in this project via the Swan Maiden/Animal Wife motif.

Motherhood and transformation are both addressed, albeit indirectly, in the work by American artist Kiki Smith. Smith returns to classical mythology, religious iconography and fairy tales in her explorations of the transformative themes of birth, death and resurrection through feminine archetypes. In Lying with the Wolf (fig. 20), Wearing the Skin (fig. 21), and Rapture (fig. 22), the patron saint of Paris, St. Genevieve “commun[es] with a wolf, tak[es] shelter with its pelt, and [is] born from its womb,” 32 simultaneously alluding to myths of nurturing She-Wolves (such as Romulus and Remus) and Little Red Riding Hood’s

resurrection/rebirth from the belly of a wolf. Smith’s work taps into universals and archetypes, whereas my work draws on a personal experience that is still raw and palpable.

Fairy tales speak of universal dilemmas about the basic human predicament. Bruno Bettelheim sees that “contrary to many modern children’s stories, in fairy tales evil is as omnipresent as virtue. In practically every fairy tale good and evil are given body” to thereby allowing a fuller metaphorical understanding of the world we inhabit and contributing more comprehensively to a child’s inner growth. Mythologist Marina Warner sees shape-shifting in fairy tales as permission to “dream alternatives”, particularly alternatives that allow one to escape a horrible fate or protect oneself from the wrath of another. She argues further that fairy tales are a way of “making sense of universal matters… that they enjoy a more vigorous life than we perhaps acknowledge, and exert more of an inspiration and influence than we think.”

Using the fluid medium of watercolour in works such as Hello there (hell here) II (2008) (fig. 23) and Visual Distraction (2008) (fig. 24) Australian artist Jennifer Mills renders highly detailed self-portraits which then undergo transformation into the dark superhero, Batwoman. Motherhood has demanded Mills chose an art making process she can undertake at home (her studio is the kitchen table) so that she may fulfil her son’s need for specialised care. Like Mills, I am interested in the escape offered by a black, winged alter ego and the power of the garment to effect a transformation from the everyday to the magical/superhuman and transport one to a

34 Ibid.
35 Bearskin, Selkie (Scottish seals), Donkeyskin,, Kitsune (Japanese fox spirits), the Peacock Maiden, Buffalo Girl to mention a few.
‘better’ place. In my instance it is the black swan rather than the nocturnal bat whose escapist associations I will be channelling, through the construction of physical garments and talismans.

These artists work together to build a picture of the mother and of transformation in contemporary visual art practice. However at no point has my research led me to any one artist who is specifically investigating the transforming mother, as a vehicle for tackling the subject of Postnatal Depression.
**Proposed Project**

For my research project I will draw upon first-person experience of Postnatal Depression and the metaphor of enchanted transformation to explore strategies for creating talismans and garments that suggest the possibility of reconciliation between conflicting notions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ motherhood. The black swan as the Animal Wife will form the chief motif through which I will explore the fluid spaces between woman and mother, ‘good’ and ‘bad’ mother and the possibilities offered by the transitional space of ‘good enough’ mothering.

I will produce works that visualise alternative readings of the mother, exposing inconsistencies in expectations of motherhood through expressions of self-talk, coping mechanisms, and transformation for the purposes of escape and protection. The objects I produce will include wearable art objects that allude to charms, talismans and amulets, drawing on past and present cultural traditions from various parts of the world that utilise such items for the purpose of protection, healing or granting wishes. For example, in Catholic Latin America believers commonly make offerings to saints of small objects fashioned into body parts, animals, or domestic objects known as *milagros* (miracles). Similar objects are worn on their person as *dijes* (charms)\(^37\) (figs. 25-32).

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My research will encompass feminine archetypes and transformation through the construction of animal based props along the lines of Deborah Klein’s Moth Masks (fig. 33), Beata Batorowicz’s Daughterhood[^38] and other mask based works (fig. 34), Jennifer Mill’s Batwoman drawings (fig. 35) and Rebecca Horn’s cocoon-like Feathered Prison Fan[^39] (fig. 36). My exploration of the power of the garment to suggest transformation will focus on the production of a black swan robe for the mother and protective garments adorned with talismans for children, utilising shamanistic resonances of animal biological materials. In some instances digital photographic prints and video will be used to document the installation and wearing of these objects, and may also form finished works in their own right that negotiate the space between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ motherhood, providing insights into the psychological challenges and contradictions of motherhood.

These various processes and outcomes are documented in this Appropriate Durable Record and final works will be presented in an exam exhibition in the RMIT School of Art Gallery, from the 14th to the 16th of May, 2013.

**Main objective**

The objective of this project is to create wearable art objects that allude to transformative garments and protective talismans for motherhood in crisis, in order to offer accessible insights into the challenges and contradictions of Postnatal Depression.
**Aims**

Through this research project I aim to:

- Explore the underlying cultural ideologies of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ motherhood in Australia and the West.
- Explore the fluid tensions between notions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ motherhood.
- Explore the notion of escape as a strategy for ‘good’ motherhood.
- Investigate the Animal Wife motif, especially the black swan as a vehicle for exploring motherhood in crisis and the archetypes of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ mothers.
- Explore the repetitive and mechanical nature of traditional women’s work and craft techniques (e.g. needlecraft, beadwork, featherwork) as coping strategies for motherhood in crisis.
- Explore the talismanic associations of biological materials (such as feathers, wishbones, fingernails, hair, eyelashes) and non-precious materials/objects (such as copper coins, ceramic shards, plastic toys) to suggest protective metamorphosis.
- Explore escapist/transformative garments and protective talismans as a strategy for neutralising moments of crisis.
- Explore image capture (e.g. photography, video) as a means of contextualising and activating the transformative and protective resonances of the garments and talismans.
Research Questions

How might my firsthand experience of Postnatal Depression inform the creation of ‘transformative’ garments and ‘protective’ talismans?

How might the Animal Wife motif, in particular the black swan, serve to explore underlying cultural ideologies of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ motherhood?
Unlike pre-Baby Boomer generations in which the raison d’être of a woman was to raise a family, the decision to become a mother has become much more open-ended for a contemporary generation of women from developed countries, with access to contraception, IVF and the opportunities offered by fulfilling careers and financial independence. In the early eighties American psychiatrist Ann Dally observed that there was a mounting ambivalence toward motherhood and women were growing increasingly resistant to the idea of becoming a mother because “they know that they will have to devote most of themselves, and their time and energy to [being a mother] for many years” which prevents them from continuing on their previous work/life trajectory. Dally also discusses a burgeoning opacity surrounding the realities of motherhood “partly because few people have practical experience of family life with young children before they have their own... and partly because society tends to idealise the experience of motherhood which means that the darker side is not readily or openly discussed.”

The truth is that motherhood does not come naturally to all women. My experience of new motherhood did not fit the image I had conjured for myself prenatally, and was further exacerbated by a diagnosis of Postnatal Depression. In my case the perceived failure to gracefully transform into a ‘good’ mother compounded by my desire to escape my domestic situation generated negative self-talk and diminishing self-esteem, returning constantly to the question, “Why am I such a bad mother?”

During the early months of motherhood I developed affirmations, mantras and rituals that enabled me to escape my internal

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41 ibid.
torment. A personal rewriting of fairy tales played like films in my mind, with The Swan Maiden narrative resonating especially with my experience of new motherhood. In a personal re-imagining of the tale, the swan is black rather than white, and only the mother knows the location of the enchanted robe. Rather than escaping her marriage, my version of the Black Swan uses the charmed garment to remove herself from moments of maternal crisis, as a protective measure for both the children and herself. I eventually realised that my fantasies of ‘preventative’ transformation into a Black Swan might in fact constitute ‘good’ mothering, or at the very least ‘good enough’ mothering. Re-imagining the Black Swan as existing somewhere between the opposing binaries of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ motherhood offered a space for me to come to terms with the complex psychological challenges of motherhood, something I wish to explore further through the construction of garments and talismans that suggest transformation and protection.

In his essay ‘Australian Gothic’, Professor Gerry Turcotte considers the darkness that pervades the Australian psyche stating, “the Antipodes was a world of reversals, the dark subconscious of Britain... the dungeon of the world”\textsuperscript{42} in which the trees shed their bark not their leaves, where the swans are black not white, and the seasons are in reverse. Turcotte’s paper resonated with my transformative experience of motherhood; of being uprooted from my pre-conceived notion of myself as a mother, and finding myself in a topsy turvy world in which temporarily ‘abandoning’ my children through escapist fantasies was the most effective strategy for protecting them. Living in Mildura I encounter black swans on a regular basis so I particularly identify with the Black Swan motif and see the cultural contradictions and complexities that have been invested in this native bird as a poetic framework for explorations of motherhood in crisis.

My work will contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding feminine archetypes and transformation through the use of animal-based props in visual arts, however will turn a spotlight on motherhood in crisis and Postnatal Depression, subjects which remain largely unrepresented in Western visual culture. By subverting the binaries inherent in conventional Black Swan and Animal Wife narratives and drawing on the intermediate, transformative spaces and states suggested by shamanistic garments and protective talismans, I will challenge archetypes of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ motherhood and offer a poetic framework for explorations and validations of the ‘good enough’ mother. I will also contribute to an exploration of the performative potential of wearable sculptural objects as have Martha McDonald with The Weeping Dress (2011) (fig. 37), Nick Cave’s Soundsuits (2009) (fig. 38) and Marcus Coates with Pub Shaman (2007) (fig. 39).


http://www.creativereview.co.uk/cr-blog/2010/february/hair-and-everywhere

http://www.artvehicle.com/events/94
METHODS

I will research psychology and mythology, with a focus on the topics of good and bad motherhood, the Animal Wife motif in fairy tales, the Black Swan motif, in order to explore the underlying cultural ideologies of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ motherhood in Australia and the West.

I will explore the potential for discarded materials such as chicken bones, hair, feathers, ceramic shards, plastic knick-knacks, to suggest transcendence from the everyday through ‘shamanistic’ metamorphosis. These materials will be sourced from second-hand stores, discarded biological material, personal and familial possessions and found objects, and used in the construction of talismans/charms/amulets and garments. Hair will be collected from hairbrushes, eyelashes will be collected where they fall and fingernail clippings will be gathered up after manicures. In the process of constructing the garments and talismans framed by myths of escapist transformation, I will explore the potential of the mechanical, repetitive construction techniques (based on traditional women’s work such as needlework, weaving, and featherwork), to serve as coping strategies for motherhood in crisis.

The research will be undertaken at the dual locations of my family home in the Sunraysia region and Melbourne (RMIT University library and School of Art ADR Reading Room).
DOCUMENTATION OF PROJECT

The following pages document the visual research undertaken in the course of this project as well as personal reflections on process and idea development. While the latter is not strictly required for examination (and is therefore largely informal in nature), I have nevertheless found the writing to be a useful tool for clarifying my intentions and evaluating my outcomes. I include it here to offer extra insights to the reader.
cathexis

scans

talismans

drawings

drawings

fight or flight

wish dress

mermaid legs

protective coat

foxing

maternity

transformation
In psychoanalysis, cathexis is defined as the process of investment of mental or emotional energy into a person, object, or idea. This is the title for a work that originated as a collection of thistle seeds referred to as ‘Father Christmases’. As a child I would catch a Father Christmas as it floated by on the breeze, make a wish and release it to ensure the wish would come true. During the early months of experiencing PND, quite subconsciously I collected these wishes as a backstop or safety net for my family and me.

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This collection lived on the kitchen bench in a jar and grew as new collections of wishbones, coins, eyelashes, dandelions, salt, fortunes from cookies and teeth were added to it. These collections were refined and became Cathexis (plate 2), but more importantly were the beginning of my thinking about the protective nature of talismans and transformative garments.
Cathexis triggered a conscious collecting process whereby I gathered small objects from around the home and began grouping these together in various arrangements to alter their reading, and manipulate their meaning or potency.

A talisman (amulet, charm) is any object intended to bring good luck or protection to its owner. The owner invests power in the talisman relative to its personal significance. From a young age I was taught to make wishes on my birthday candles or falling stars, keep a lock of hair or a photograph in a locket or a stone in my pocket for luck. I find these domestic superstitions comforting, especially when I am feeling particularly vulnerable.

Early on in the collection phase I realised that the objects needed to have already belonged to me, my mother or my grandmothers for me to attribute any protective properties to them. This precluded me from buying objects from the antique or secondhand stores and limited me to what was already in my possession. The possible objects for inclusion were gathered together and digitally scanned singularly or in small group combinations. This collection of images became a source book of talismans, included in the examination exhibition.
**Drawing-a-day project**

**2011, computer printout paper, individual page 24.2 cm x 29.7 cm, total pages 24.2 cm x 1871 cm.**

Parallel to the production of the scans, I began a drawing-a-day project using these collected objects and other ideas inspired by my research into talismans, coping mechanisms, family rituals and significant past experiences of motherhood and PND.

An important component of this work was to use samples of news stories about ‘bad’ parents I began collecting shortly after the birth of my daughter. This came about as a by-product of using my hotmail account, as I would pause to wait for the Nine MSN page to come up to ensure I had logged out, I would skim the sensationalised headlines. One day I read a headline about a man who was on trial for the murder of his daughter. Curious, I clicked on the story and as I read I began to cry inconsolably about the little girl who died from neglect, discovered on her bedroom floor with black vomit and bull ants coming from her mouth. This article prompted a secretive and obsessive collection over the following four years of articles about children who had died at the hands of their parents. At the time it was not clear to me why I created this file, but on reflection through counselling it is apparent that I found some comfort in them as they were proof that I was in fact not as ‘bad’ a parent as I thought I was.

This drawing project was undertaken as a form of stream of consciousness, including readings, ideas, articles, research, sayings, memories and collections. These were translated into drawings on obsolete computer printout paper. I felt it was important

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that the drawing document be continuous and equitable in its inclusion of every good and bad drawing alike. As such, it reflects the constant flux between success and failure in daily life, whereby mistakes cannot be edited out, instead embracing these low points as markers for victories. This in turn fosters an acceptance that one may not necessarily need to conform to the ideal of a ‘good’ mother in order to be a ‘good enough’ mother.
A mantra is a sound, syllable, word, or group of words that are considered capable of creating transformation (cf. spiritual transformation).
Hugs and Kisses/Noughts and Crosses

2011-12, Magnani Corona drawing paper, 75cm x 75cm.

From the drawing-a-day project came a series of larger, more formal drawings that were made in the studio. These works deal specifically with my personal physical and psychological experiences of Postnatal Depression.

The first drawing Hugs and Kisses/Noughts and Crosses #1 (plate 7) references writing lines for punishment. The single phrase repetition ‘I am a good mother’ was a personal mantra that I used on particularly bad days. However hidden amongst the lines are the odd ‘bad mother’ phrases, to acknowledge the inevitable slip of tongue and emphasise the daily battle of believing in one’s self.

Hugs and Kisses/Noughts and Crosses #2 (plate 8) is a circular image made with graphite. Its creative process involved holding my arm at shoulder height and repetitively draw a circle on the page. This could take anything from 1 ½ hrs to 4 hrs. As the graphite pencil pushes into the paper, a mercurial sheen builds up and the paper begins to buckle and warp under the pressure. This drawing can be read in numerous ways: referencing how we draw a hug, simulating a safe space inside the circle or a well-worn path. For me however it specifically recalls the circle that I would walk in the liminal space between our kitchen, dining and lounge rooms. This ritual enabled me to block out the chaos of domestic life and gave me a limited time of escape, mind numbing yet meditative in its action.
The third drawing Hugs and Kisses/Noughts and Crosses #3 (plate 9) is a grid of small squares each with a red cross in it. These drawings were made using several different mediums including acrylic, gouache, ink, and lipstick. The crosses can be interpreted as kisses, as days marked off a calendar or as the mark against your name for getting something wrong, in my case my repeated errors in motherhood.
A Woman’s Work is Never Done

2011, Knitting Nancy, wool, nails, dimensions variable.

I came across a bag of Knitting Nancys in an opportunity shop mid 2011 and began French knitting lengths of red using single and double strands of wools and adding in shorter samples of colour variations to give a greater depth of colour and texture to the strands (plate 10-11). These experiments originally began as a way to keep my hands busy during the initial proposal writing and confirmation period, but evolved very quickly into A Woman’s Work is Never Done (plate 16), exhibited at LEAP, for 2012 International Women’s Day celebrations in Mildura.
The text is taken from Margaret Atwood’s poem *A Red Shirt* in which Atwood draws on the goddess myth of Demeter and Persephone to construct the imagery of a relationship between mother and daughter and the inherent responsibilities of passing on the lessons of life.

This artwork loops together a number of ideas that I was considering at the time and were woven into the work as it developed. Ideas such as: women’s work or busy work, the production of women’s work/artwork/mother’s work is never finished. I felt the knitted lengths were suggestive of an umbilical cord, resonating with the last line of Atwood’s poem “a long thread of red blood, not yet broken”.

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46 It is my observation that French knitting seems to have very little functional responsibility other than keeping one’s hands busy.
When this work was dismantled it became the foundation for the talisman neckpieces I was developing.
The inspiration for this work in two parts came from my desire as a mother to protect my children at all times, especially when they are in the world away from me. While researching various cultural utilisations of the talisman, I began collecting and collaging (plate 17 and 18) as a beginning point for trialing objects that could be utilised in these final sculptural works.
The French knitting lengths from A Woman’s Work is Never Done were fashioned into talismans designed to wrap around the neck numerous times. Early experiments show considerations of object choice, object placement and techniques of attachment onto the French knitting sections.

During the process of creating this work, the weight of the objects and how heavily they would sit around the neck of a child got me thinking about how heavily a parent’s wishes, advice, hopes and desires might weigh their child down.
In Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* the mariner is forced to wear an albatross around his neck to remind him of his erroneous behaviour. The feeling of something weighing heavily on you, having a weight upon your shoulders, wearing your mistakes as a public shaming has the potential to be developed further in future works, possibly as a photographic triptych (plates 21, 22 and 23).
Talisman for L and Talisman for S.

2011-2013, wool, metallic thread, hair, found objects, dimensions variable.

Before constructing the final works, the colours and materials of the neck pieces were carefully considered. The grey wool alludes to the notion that an amulet is more potent the more valuable the material from which it is crafted e.g. silver being more powerful than copper or brass. The red makes links to the umbilical cord and threads of feminine connectedness.
between generations. The hair, which has been gleaned from my family’s hairbrushes over several years, connects the physical with the spiritual, in the same way a medicine man, shaman or witch might use hair to cast a spell or call up the spirits.  

Aboriginal colleague and Barkindji Elder Peter Peterson once told me the story of the Kadaitcha-man, or Feather Foot, who wears slippers made from emu feathers so he can sneak up on you. If he manages to steal some of your hair he can ‘sing you up’ and you will belong to him.
Each object included in the final talismans was chosen for reasons ranging from personal to universal. Some examples of items selected for inclusion are; the dice for taking chances, the music box ballerina for dreams, the mirror for self-reflection, the scissors for bringing things to an end, the wishbones for wishes, the nappy pin for security, the bluebird for happiness, the glass lens for clarity and focus, the dragonfly for power and poise, the ballet slipper for grace, the domino for a chain reaction, the butterfly for transformation, the star for guidance, the frog for love in unexpected places, the rings for eternity, the whistle for getting attention and the key for access.

While making the neckpieces it became apparent that these objects would be quite cumbersome and impractical to wear in everyday life, and I imagine it would be quite difficult to convince a child to wear one! This led me to consider the possibility of surreptitiously stitching talismans into children’s clothing, creating a protective wardrobe of clothes.
Fight or Flight (a reversible caplet for shifting psychological states)

2012, wool, porcelain teeth, emu feathers, button, cotton, dimensions variable.

Remembering stories about the Russian royals, the Romanov family, who sewed gems and pearls into the linings and hems of their clothes with the intention of smuggling them out of the country, I considered how a garment’s purpose could be reassigned through the addition of significant objects and secretive compartments.

Whilst working on the talismans I imagined a child’s wardrobe full of clothes that had been discretely adjusted or added to by the mother to alleviate her anxiety in times when the children were in the world beyond the reach of her protective care. This type of protection through clothing is seen in fairy tales such as Red Riding Hood, in which the mother or grandmother makes a cloak for her daughter to wear whilst travelling through the forest. The cloak serves a number of purposes both practical and psychological; it might keep one warm in the chilly air or it might offer symbolic protection from strangers or predators. I was inspired to make a caplet that might operate on both levels, providing warmth for the child and comfort for the mother.

The caplet references a Northern European style of clothing that is reminiscent of that worn by children in my Grimm fairy tales book from childhood. I have deliberately implied connections between the garment, enchantment and multiple forms of protection. The caplet is made from a thick woollen fabric, cut and sewn to be reversible. I have a collection of vintage porcelain false teeth that I used to stitch onto one side of the garment, giving the child extra teeth to ‘bare’ when
confronted by danger. The other side has emu feathers that were collected from road kill. I enjoy the irony of using the feathers of a flightless bird to assist in ‘flight’ from threat.

This object was the first in my wardrobe of protective clothes for a brother and sister.
Recognising the greater potency with which clothing with a history is imbued, I made a conscious decision to source pre-existing garments. I conceived of a children’s wardrobe consisting of a caplet, dress and tights for a girl and pants and a coat for a boy. These five pieces would become a larger installation of work, a wardrobe of talismanic clothes, each one adjusted and embellished by the mother to comfort her in the knowledge that her children are protected when they are away from her.

Sourcing an unused girl’s school tunic in an opportunity shop was the beginning of The Wish Dress (being Dorothy) (plate 40). With assistance from a local restaurateur, I was able to obtain 80+ fragile quail wishbones, which I boiled clean and bleached to a pure white. Each wishbone was individually hand stitched into the box pleats of the dress front (plates 42 and 43). The plastic fastener was removed and replaced with a buckle made from chicken wishbones bound together with cotton (plate 41). I stitched a small glass vial (holding eyelashes collected from around my home) to the yolk of the dress in the location where one would wear a brooch (plate 44). All these items can be used to make wishes: the wishbones snapped in half, the eyelashes placed on a fingertip and blown into the air. Should a little girl be in need of an emergency wish, all she need do is break the glass.
Little Mermaid Legs (anti-drowning tights)

2012, repurposed winter tights, carp scales, cotton, dimensions variable.

The single recurring dream I experienced as a child was centred on my profound fear of drowning in the river. Having grown up on the Murray I was taught two things at a young age; to have great respect for the unpredictable waters of the river and how to swim. These lessons are now mine to teach my own children. Herein lies the motivation for constructing the mermaid legs.

The thick cotton grey tights were sourced from an opportunity shop, chosen for their evidence of previous wear, notably pilling and thinning in the knees. I embellished these with carp fish scales sourced from discarded fish along the banks of the river (plate 45). The scales were washed, dried and sized (plate 46) before sewing began. Each scale is pierced twice with a needle and then stitched onto the tights as you would a button. After trialling several options of scale density (plate 51) I decided on an offset pattern, spaced slightly apart to avoid replicating actual scales and instead alluding to sequins or beads of childhood fantasy dress ups. The scales stretch from the toes to the thigh (garter line) where a small amulet is pinned to the left leg. My grandfather purchased the amulet from a Chinese medicine man; its purpose is to aid breathing and expand lung capacity. The tights serve a dual purpose; they indulge a young girl’s desire to be a mermaid while also alleviating the mother’s fears for her daughter’s safety when she is in and around water.
PROTECTIVE COAT (a boy in echidna’s clothing)

2012, repurposed wool coat, cotton, echidna quills, dimensions variable.

The fourth work of the wardrobe suite is a warm winter coat for a boy. After spending 40 plus hours on a fleecy grey hoodie I purchased from a store, I concluded that it was too contemporary to use for this project. I went looking for something a little more timeless, reminiscent of the clothing worn by children in my Grimm fairy tales book, drawing upon universal notions of innocence and vulnerability. Unable to source an appropriate pre-existing coat I purchased a second-hand woman’s woollen jacket from an opportunity shop, with the intent of remodelling it into a child’s coat. The woman’s coat was un-picked, the boy’s coat was cut from a number of merged patterns and sewn together. The only material that was not reused from the original jacket was the cotton with which I stitched it together. In the
end, I realised that a re-purposed woman’s coat undergoing transformation into a garment for protecting a child served my conceptual intentions perfectly.

The coat is a garment for disguise and protection, with it’s own cloaking device like that used by spaceships in Star Wars. These shielding devices are not employed at all times but used in moments of need. My intention was to create armour for a boy, in this case a hood which could be pulled up to activate protection, that could be employed at a moment’s notice. The plan was to use echidna quills, however that was dependent upon an echidna becoming available. I am grateful to a friend in Merbein, for her gift of a road kill echidna. The monotreme took three months to decompose to a point where I was able to harvest approximately half the animal’s quills. These were washed, oiled and sorted into size ready for application.
The physical attributes of an echidna quill made stitching it to fabric easier than I expected, requiring no drilling or piercing. I was able to use a double looped running stitch to attach them to the jacket back and hood. Even so, stitching the quills was tedious, slow and hazardous, the sewing alone took over 160 hours to complete. I found that the laborious, repetitive nature of this task and the constant pricks and minor wounds mirrored my experience of being a mother: a series of painful, repeated challenges that are ultimately overcome by a compulsion to push on, to achieve a sense of satisfaction as each row is stitched into place and the task is eventually completed.
plate 67

68
Foxing (daywear for sly and cunning)

2012, repurposed school trousers, zip, cotton, eyelet, foxtail, dimensions variable.

Foxes have always been a part of my life, first as a child growing up on a farm and now as the carer of the family pets, our chickens. The fox is popularly conceived as a stealthy and sly creature that shows traits of cunning desperation in times of eminent capture. I find the lack of such characteristics in children sweet and endearing, however I am also aware that innocence, gullibility and naivety can make a child vulnerable to various dangers.

I conceived of a pair of boys grey school trousers with a secret pocket housing a fox’s tail, one that could be tucked out of sight when not required, but easily accessible in times of need. The tail would be accessed via a zip that wrapped diagonally from the coccyx, around the left leg to the mid thigh.

Although I am a competent sewer I was nervous about cutting into the fabric of the trousers. I made a practice run but was not happy enough with the outcome to undertake the final work on my own. For this I engaged the services of a seamstress to make the pocket. Following my explicit instructions, she made a trial run for me to approve and then began on the final work. While the seamstress was working on the trousers, I made provision to attach the tail. This included inserting an eyelet through the leather at the tail’s end, and attaching it to the existing belt loop at the centre back of the trousers via an extra loop. This method of attachment allows for the tail to swing freely when out of its pocket, suggesting a newfound confidence and swagger.
MATERNITY

2012, repurposed maternity bra, rose thorns, cotton, dimensions variable.

To breastfeed or not to breastfeed, that is the question. As every imminent mother is told, breast milk is regarded as the most nutritional option for feeding an infant in the first six months of their life, increases resistance to infection and disease and lessens the risk of allergy and food intolerances. However it has become quite a battlefield and serves to reinforce stereotypes of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ mothering. We see conflicting news items about breastfed babies being smarter, happier, stronger or fussier, behaviourally difficult, harder to settle. Either way a mother is damned.

Meret Oppenheim’s provocative 1936 sculpture Object (Breakfast in Fur) (fig. 40) inspires an immediate physical reaction from viewers that deepens into a psychological conflict. The fur is seductive and tactile yet we are repulsed once we consider what it must be like to take our tea in such a cup. What does the artist mean by presenting us with such a conundrum? In making MATERNITY (plate 80) my aim was to inspire the same order of response, inviting the audience in close only to have them recoil in revulsion before moving back in to satisfy their curiosity. What must it be like to wear that bra? Why has the artist stitched those thorns in those places?

MATERNITY reflects the pressure I felt to breastfeed my own babies despite the emotional, psychological and physical toll it often took. Contrary to the fantasy of the fecund, nurturing mother, my personal experience of breastfeeding was tarnished by the painful reality of engorged breasts and cracked nipples, pain that was both aggravated and alleviated through the act of breastfeeding.
The maternity bra has thorns stitched into the parts that correspond to pressure points for feeding mothers: the areola, the breastbone, and the straps that go over the shoulder and around the body. The bra was sourced from an opportunity shop, chosen for its skin coloured neutrality and existing milk stains. The thorns were sourced from a local rose farm's green prunings. One by one the thorns were snapped off, had a pin pushed through them and set aside to dry for around a week. Once the wood had browned the pin was removed and the thorn could be stitched as you would a bead to a garment. Snapping thorns from their stems caused my thumbs to ache and my fingers to become more sensitive with every prick. All the while I recalled the dual experience of pain and relief as I fed my child.
Transformative and protective garments

Whilst conducting research for my project I looked at fashion and garment-based art for examples of garment construction that suggested the possibility of transformation or maternal protection. I particularly responded to works by Indigenous artist Nalda Searles, Australian artist Rosslynd Piggott and Peruvian photographer Milagros de la Torres.

Lisa Young’s description of Searles’ work *Vixen* (fig. 42) particularly resonated with me. Young explains that Searles works with sourced, reinterpreted, and sometimes gifted garments. The base garment for *Vixen* is one such gift, given to Searles in the 1960s when she was nursing at Heathcote Hospital. Searles reinterpreted the fox fur stole into *Vixen*, the name for a female fox, but has chosen to turn it inside out exposing the underbelly of her beast. The original pocket has been added to with pink rosettes made from satin blanket edging, reminiscent of a mother’s distended feeding nipples. The reinterpretation of the stole has evoked a nurturing tone, as if you could snuggle into it for warmth and protection.51

Piggott’s 1996-7 work *La somnambule* (the sleepwalker) (fig. 43) consists of two silk nightdresses fashioned on 19th century French examples found at a flea market in Paris52. The first nightdress is unravelling from the waist down and the other has elongated sleeves and is stitched all over with eyehooks. The ‘bodies’ are seemingly suspended in mid air, floating and wafting as in a dream. The work evokes a sense of presence through absence, of consciousness and unconsciousness, and the shift from one state to another.

De la Torres has crafted her images with great care, using a simple coat hanger for presentation and diffused natural lighting, creating a documentary series of seemingly unremarkable clothing. The secret of de la Torres’ photographs is only revealed by the title of the work, - Bulletproof (fig. 44). Each image is of a finely crafted, boutique purchased item of bulletproof clothing. These deceptively simple wardrobes of men and women’s clothing are the ultimate in protective garments.


http://www.artealdia.com/International/Contents/News/Tania_Candiani_Milagros_de_la_Torre_and_Matias_Duville
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<th>Fig. 45</th>
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In my search for examples of creative responses to the black swan, I soon discovered they are referenced very little in the Arts, except as the counterpoint to the white swan, most notably in the Tchaikovsky ballet Swan Lake (fig. 49) and the 2010 Aronofsky movie Black Swan. The black swan appears most frequently in Western Australia for tourism purposes as illustrated by the Australian National Travel Association’s 1962 Commonwealth Games campaign featuring the Douglas Annand image of a black swan (fig. 46). The water bird is also significant to local indigenous cultures: Yelakitj Moort elders of the Swan River Valley in South West Western Australia tell their dreamtime story of a swan turned from white to black due to his incessant vanity. In a rare example of the bird appearing in the visual arts, a painting by Australian Kate Bergin references Nicholas Nassim Taleb’s book on probability in her 2009 oil on canvas, Call of the Highly Improbable (fig. 45).

Feathers in fashion design proved a more fruitful field of research. I was particularly interested in the transformative allusions within Alexander McQueen’s oeuvre. Well known for his dramatic designs and theatrical runway shows, Mc Queen’s use of materials was at the cutting edge of fashion design. Feathers, and birds have been a common theme throughout his work, revived time and time again in his collections.

His dress The Horn of Plenty (fig. 50) from the autumn/winter 2009–10 collection was inspired by 1950s haute couture. Constructed from dyed duck feathers to imply raven feathers, McQueen is able to transform the traditional harbinger of death into a romantic symbol of love.

Cloaks, capes, robes: these clothing articles possess transformative qualities, religious resonances or cultural significance that I had not considered at the commencement of the project and that did not necessarily correspond with my intentions. The mother’s Black Swan cloak I had initially visualised was itself transformed and shifted by Google image searches that began a journey of distilling the narrative intent of my garment. Originally planned as a long 18thC style cloak, I ultimately abandoned this in favour of the blazer jacket, a 21stC style that I might actually wear in day-to-day life. The visualisation process also included questions such as would I cover the whole jacket in feathers? If, not, which parts would be covered and which parts would not, and why? Would the jacket be visible through the feathers? If so, what colour should it be? I felt the jacket’s colour was also an important consideration.

From an aesthetic perspective white was too stark a contrast, black blended too much with feathers, patterns were too distracting. Grey, however, offered a neutral and subtle backdrop for the feathers and also visually linked the mother’s garment to the children’s garments, creating a family wardrobe from the final installation of works.
Joseph Beuys also offers a precedent in the visual arts for the use of grey to suggest shamanistic transformation and healing, having regularly used grey felt in works dealing with the magical, the protective and totemic connectedness to the animal. Beuys says of Felt Suit (fig. 58) his intention extended beyond the material to encompass the “spiritual warmth or the beginning of an evolution”.  

fig. 58

Transformation (the Animal Wife)

The suit jacket that was decided upon was my third purchase from an opportunity shop. It is cut from grey wool, suited all my aesthetic and conceptual requirements, and was a perfect fit.
Once the required Department of Sustainability and Environment Research Permit was obtained for feather collection and possession, the search for black swan breeding grounds commenced. Following conversations with Victor Hurley from the Department of Sustainability and Environment and staff from Healesville Sanctuary and Serendip Sanctuary, I made field trips to Lake Wendouree, Lake Purrumbete Conservation Reserve and Lake Bookar Conservation Reserve. This was a definitive point in the project as I made three important discoveries: it was several months off breeding season so there had been little recent swan activity; the locations were naturally very windy meaning very few feathers remained; and the feathers themselves were in fact grey, not black, and only appeared black en masse. Despite initially wanting to use the black swan feathers I was forced to look at other possibilities, such as alternative feathers from farmed birds, or purchasing black swan or white swan feathers from commercial sources. Eventually I settled on purchasing white swan feathers dyed black from the northern hemisphere delighting in the conceptual appositeness of using a feather which itself had been transformed from white to black for the purpose of the work. I purchased 1250 individual feathers, which were then sorted. Each feather was graded by length and, where necessary, the quill was trimmed or neatened. Approximately 15% were of substandard quality and were discarded: on completion I was left with only 23 unused feathers.
Transformation (the Animal Wife) work in progress

plate 83

plate 85

84

86
Each feather was hand stitched onto the jacket using a double-looped running stitch, beginning at the bottom of the garment, working up toward the shoulder and finally finishing off with the collar. After a lengthy sewing session my hands would often be stained black, as though my skin was being impregnated with the essence of black swan. The sewing took in excess of 220 hours to complete and although the process was, in equal parts, meditative and frustrating, the final product gave me a sense of overwhelming fulfilment and satisfaction - again, not unlike my experience of raising children.
The logistics of examination and exhibition require that the jacket be presented as an empty shell without human presence, however once worn on the human body it vibrates with meaning and agency, human movements creating avian wings and hackles. It is no longer a suit jacket but rather a possibility for transformation.
Transformation (the Animal Wife)

2012, repurposed wool jacket, feathers, cotton, dimensions variable.
Considerations for presentation.

Presentation of the talisman works has been an important component of their creation; trialing alternative spatial narratives enabled me to refine the relationship between the works. I tested the work hung side by side at adult eyeline, hung at child neck height, hung with a mirror as the mother proxy at varying heights and distances from each other. I finally settled on a configuration to create a ‘family portrait’ of mother and children (plate 98).
I was granted access to the RMIT School of Art Gallery over the summer break on the 16th and 17th of January, 2013. This gave me the time to experiment with possible presentation options for the wardrobe works. I trialled clustering the works in various combinations and sequences. All of these were hung from a single hook on a coat hanger, however I have continued to reconsider these devices and have sourced other possible hanging props.
For the presentation of Transformation (the Animal Wife) I have been experimenting with making fake wallpaper. Loaded with domestic references, the paper is intended to ground the work in a feminine space, albeit a counterfeit space, for disguising ‘counterfeit’ motherhood.

I am using a black and white scan and printout of an opulent reproduction French wallpaper that I found at a second-hand store. The tone of the paper is lightened and knocked back in intensity to avoid overpowering the jacket. This has been done by rubbing white pastels into the surface (fig. 104), and overprinting with a semi translucent block printed wood grain. Experiments with hanging the paper have included a paste-up solution of flour, water and sugar (fig. 105), and pinning to the wall (fig. 103). Other considerations have been size and shape of the wallpapered area, line of vision as the viewer enters the gallery space, whether a mirror should be included and possible hanging solutions for the jacket itself.
So that the audience can have a more holistic understanding of Transformation (the Animal Wife), I have been experimenting with video documentation of the jacket, capturing footage of the jacket at its greatest potency, i.e. when activated by the moving body. The intention is to include the video documentation in the exhibition space.
The dominant view on entering the gallery space. The Black Swan jacket is not visible on entry but its reflection in the mirror alludes to the work hidden behind the column.
On approach the jacket emerges from behind the column, anchored in a domestic space provided by the wallpaper prints and the mirror. The examiners were asked to put the jacket on in order to activate its performative and transformative aspect, an integral part of the viewing experience.
Transformation (the Animal Wife)

2012, repurposed wool jacket, feathers, cotton, dimensions variable.
The second dominant wall displayed the wardrobe of children’s clothes. The pants and stockings were pinned to the wall, the jacket was displayed on a mannequin, the dress and caplet each hung on a custom designed and made steel armature.
plate 115

The girl's wardrobe.
Foxing (daywear for sly and cunning)

2012, repurposed school trousers, zip, cotton, eyelet, foxtail, dimensions variable.
PROTECTIVE COAT (a boy in echidna’s clothing)

2012, repurposed wool coat, cotton, echidna quills, dimensions variable.
The Wish Dress (being Dorothy)

2011-12, dress, quail and chicken bones, cotton, eyelashes, glass, cork, dimensions variable.
Fight or Flight (a reversible caplet for shifting psychological states)

2012, wool, porcelain teeth, emu feathers, button, cotton, dimensions variable.
Little Mermaid Legs (anti-drowning tights)

2012, repurposed winter tights, carp scales, cotton, dimensions variable.
Talisman for L. and Talisman for S.

2011-2013, wool, metallic thread, hair, found objects, dimensions variable.

The talisman neckpieces and the mirror were hung on the wall to the left of the entry. On approach the mirror’s reflection revealed the jacket and wallpaper on the opposite wall.
MATERNITY

2012, repurposed maternity bra, rose thorns, cotton, dimensions variable.

Concealed on a plinth behind the central column, MATERNITY slowly revealed itself as the viewer moved further into the space.
The wall to the right of entry was darkened for the purpose of projecting a video showing the jacket being activated through being worn. Also on this wall was a small photographic self portrait wearing the Black Swan jacket beside The Talisman Source Book displayed on a plinth.
plate 136
The Talisman Source Book

2011-13, digital printout/artist book, approx. 21 x 29.7 cm.

plate 137

Included was a hand-bound book covered with a grey felt that mimics the base materials used for the children’s wardrobe and the Black Swan jacket. The Talisman Source Book is an edited collection of scanned objects of personal significance.
EXHIBITION HISTORY FOR ARTWORKS PRODUCED DURING THE CANDIDACY

A Woman’s Work is Never Done
A Woman’s Work is Never Done, LEAP Project Space, Mildura, Victoria, 5th – 19th March 2012.

Hugs and Kisses/Noughts and Crosses

Talisman for L.

Talisman for S.

Fight or Flight (a reversible caplet for shifting psychological states)

The Wish Dress (being Dorothy)

Little Mermaid Legs (anti-drowning tights)
MATERNITY

Transformation (the Animal Wife)

PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS OF RESEARCH
Artist talk on Research Project to date, presented to the Sunraysia Postnatal Depression Support Network, Mildura, Victoria, 8th May 2012.

Deborah Banks, Meryl Whyte and Danielle Hobbs, ‘Local Artist Explores her Journey of Postnatal Depression’, Breakfast Program, (Mildura/Swan Hill, ABC Local Radio 104.3 FM, 8.50am 13 November 2012) [radio program].

APPENDIX

post examination exhibition invitation

The Black Swan and Postnatal Depression: preventive talismans and transformative garments for "bad" mothers

Masters by Research Project by Danielle Hobbs

5 - 7pm, Thursday 16th May, 2013
RMIT School Of Art Gallery
Building 2/Level 2, Bowen Street, Melbourne
DANIELLE HOBBS  The Black Swan and Postnatal Depression: preventive talismans and transformative garments for ‘bad’ mothers.

LIST OF WORKS

WALLS  LEFT TO RIGHT

Talisman for L and Talisman for S, 2011-2013, wool, metallic thread, hair, found objects, dimensions variable. With mirror, 48cm x 55cm.

Foxing (daywear for sly and cunning), 2012, repurposed trousers, foxtail, zip, cotton, dimensions variable.

PROTECTIVE COAT (a boy in echidna’s clothing), 2012, repurposed wool coat, cotton, echidna quills, dimensions variable. With mannequin, fox mask, t-shirt.

The Wish Dress (being Dorothy), 2012, repurposed dress, quail and chicken bones, eyelashes, cotton, glass, cork, dimensions variable. With armature.

Fight or Flight (a reversible caplet for shifting psychological states), 2012, wool, porcelain teeth, cotton, emu feathers, button, dimensions variable. With armature.

Little Mermaid Legs (anti-drowning tights), 2012, repurposed winter tights, carp scales, cotton, dimensions variable.

Transformation (the Animal Wife), repurposed wool jacket, feathers, cotton, dimensions variable. With mannequin, inkjet print wallpaper, mirror.

Transformation (the Animal Wife), 2013, video still.

Transformation (the Animal Wife), 2013, inkjet print (photograph Jason Modica).
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Books:


Fettling, Lisa and Tune, Belinda, Women's Experience of Postnatal Depression: Kitchen Table Conversations, IP Communications Pty Ltd, Melbourne, 2005.


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Podcast:

Mills, Jennifer ‘Jennifer Mills Artist Talk’ RMIT University, Art, Design, Media, 2010 retrieved 31 May 2011, iTunes Store

Film:


The Hours, DVD recording, Paramount Pictures, Los Angeles, 2002.

Image Sources:

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Figure 19
Wilkinson, T., M/Other #7, 2009, in Dr. D. Barker, M/Other Love: the first relationship and the photography of Toni Wilkinson (Artlink Vol 29, no 3), pg. 54.
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Mills, J., Hello there (hell here) II, 2008, [image]

Figure 24
Mills, J., Visual distraction, 2008, [image]

Figure 25
Eye Italia, Hand Ex-Votos, 2013, [image]

Figure 26
La Mariposa Gallery, 20 vintage Milagros, 2012, [image]

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Eleanor Brown Boutique, Gold Eye Mask Milagros, 2012, [online photograph],

Figure 30
Anonymous, Portrait miniature on ivory of Officer of the 1st Royal Dragoons Richard Crosse Circa 1770, 1770, [image]

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Figure 32
The Jewellery Loop, Gold mourning brooch with seed pearls containing hair, 2013, [image]

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Figure 58
ANNEXURE

A selection of images and artists who have been influential in my research and practice.
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arch of Hysteria, 1993, polished bronze, 83.8 x 101.6 x 58.4 cm</td>
<td>TKellein, L Bourgeois ‘Louise Bourgeois: la famille’ Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, Köln, 2006.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Woven Child (detail), 2002, fabric, wood, glass, and steel, 70 x 35 x 21 inches (fabric element); 70 x 35 x 21 inches (vitrine)</td>
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<td>Deborah Klein</td>
<td>Choreutis periploca Moth Mask,</td>
<td>2009</td>
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<td>Suspicion, 2009, watercolour, ink and oil pastel on paper, 99 x 60 cm</td>
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<td>Alexander McQueen</td>
<td>Winged Dress from La Dame Bleue Spring 2008</td>
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<td>Julia Deville</td>
<td>Mechanical wing brooch, kingfisher wing, sterling silver</td>
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<td>Terhi Heino</td>
<td>Shirt, 2011, kalanevää (fish), acrylic, oil paint, glue</td>
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| Alison Couston | Magical Golland, 1999–2000, mixed media, 79 x 76 cm
| | [http://www.hht.net.au/discover/highlights/highlights/art at the_properties/art at the_properties2/sculpture2/alison_clouston3](http://www.hht.net.au/discover/highlights/highlights/art at the_properties/art at the_properties2/sculpture2/alison_clouston3) |
| Magical Golland, 1999–2000, mixed media, 62 x 56 cm
| | [http://www.hht.net.au/discover/highlights/highlights/art at the_properties/art at the_properties2/sculpture2/alison_clouston3](http://www.hht.net.au/discover/highlights/highlights/art at the_properties/art at the_properties2/sculpture2/alison_clouston3) |
| Nalda Searles | Hybrid Stole for a Wayward Woman, 2008, animal fur, mallee leaves, silk thread, 58 x 28 x 16 cm
| Dorothy's Wild Flowers, 1998-2008, woollen overcoat, stones, thread, iron stand, 164 x 600 x 8 cm
| Kate MccGwire | Gag, 2009, mixed media with crow feathers, in antique museum cabinet, 77 x 60 x 60 cm
| Evacuate, 2010, game bird feathers
| Clement Pierre Marillier | Donkeyskin, illustration.
| Ex-votos of silver, gilt bronze and crystals from Southern France, late 19th c.
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<td>Danielle Hobbs</td>
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<td>Scarlette Sunday</td>
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<td>Julie Blackmon</td>
<td>Play Group, Pigment Ink Print, 22x22&quot;</td>
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<td>Fallen Child, 1989, silver gelatin print, 47.6 x 58.4 cm</td>
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