An exploration of new processes and products for knitted textiles: this research will explore the combination of standard and non-standard fibres and finishing processes to create three-dimensional and sculptural knitted fabric structures, while expanding the potential of domestic machine knitting to be viewed as an art form.

An exegesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (Textile Design)

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Esther Paleologos

Date : August 2009
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Abstract

Contemporary knitting over the past decade has experienced a recent resurgence in cultural interest and technical exploration. This research project aims to identify, through personal practice, the implications of knitting as undefined, removed from the boundaries of product. It is the dissolving of the lines between design, art and craft and exploring the domestically machine knitted textile via the use of materials and the inherent qualities of the fabric which are the driving factors of this research. It is through this exploration that my personal and creative process is diversified.

The traditional connotations of knitting are historical, social and cultural, in particular hand knitting. Childhood memories of mothers and grandmothers knitting out of necessity, for clothing, often evoke feelings of safety, warmth and comfort. This familiarity of the looped stitches and understanding of the knit as garment binds knitting to fashion. Industrial knitting process, as scale of stitch is reduced, begins to remove this familiarity and creates an anonymity of structure and process, for example jersey knits used for t-shirts.¹ This instant recognition for knitting as clothing is part of the design process where-by knitted fabrics work in unison with product. It is this boundary that has defined my professional practice designing for knitwear. This research involves a more experimental and fluid approach to producing the textile, considering the qualities and potential of the structure as something to celebrate in its own form.

Designers such as Issey Miyake, Hussein Chalayan and the artist Rosmarie Trockel have been influential in taking fashion concepts into the gallery, often knitted. This movement of making conceptual and political statements, especially in the case of the industrially knitted pieces by Trockel, was a step to question the traditional and feminist perceptions of knitting and using the process as a material to create art.² While these exhibitions explored the knitted textile in the form of fashion garment, the importance of diversifying the knitted cloth and displaying conceptual pieces is a major influence on this research. Also the more recent exhibition ‘Radical Lace and Subversive Knitting’, (Museum of Arts & Design New

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² Black, pp. 132-34
York 2007), has allowed for a reinvigorated forum for constructed textiles to be viewed as object, new product or purely as spatial explorations of structure. The impact of these ideas has allowed for the consideration of the textile being stripped back further and to remove the instant connotation of product application.

Exploration of materials, knitted structures and the manipulation of fabric without the constraints of identified product is the impetus of this project. The evolution of the outcomes is instrumental to the reactions of fibres, stitch and interplays of positive and negative space, while suggestions of product are accidental and created by the knitted form as it is removed from the machine. A personal interest in exploiting the knitted structures potential to possess transparency and opacity, become sculptural and changeable by hand have influenced the choices of material and stitch combination. This experimentation has informed my personal practice and the involved process of making.

The outcomes of this project have been exhibited in gallery environments, which has allowed for reflection and critical analysis of how knitted textiles are perceived. This has evoked a personal response to how the knitted textile can perform in diverse ways and has raised the question of whether the domestically machine knitted textile can be viewed as an art form.
Introduction

The outcomes of this project have resulted from extensive research and review of literature, the work of designers, craftspeople and artists. The exploration of my own practice has formed the basis for reflection and adaptation of ideas from my personal response to the making process. It is this analysis of my process in the context of contemporary textile design trends that has influenced my direction. The critical reflection during my experimentation process ultimately defined the outcomes created.

Contemporary trends in textile design are diverse and infused with innovation and exploration of textile processes, both with technological applications and cultural influences. The knitted textile, which is a key constructed textile discipline, has been traditionally associated with fashion garments and home crafts, in particular hand-knitting. Knitted textiles possess an innate response to the handcrafted garment, shaped and formed by the matriarch in the home. The inherent quality of a knitted textile, as it is formed by interlocking loops, is a fabric with strength, drape and a natural affinity to clothing as it moves with the body.

In recent times, the potential of the knitted structure has been researched and explored for new product applications and linked with medical textiles, architecture, and aerospace, for example the knitted textiles developed by PHD student Jane Scott, (University of Leeds, UK), whose work explores ‘transformable knits for architecture and spatial interventions’.3 These new applications for constructed textiles; including processes such as crochet, knitting, weaving and macramé, and describes fabrics which are ‘constructed’ from the beginning by looping, knotting or the interlocking of yarn, have greatly influenced my own perception of the knitted fabric. Artists such as Françoise Dupré (see Figure 1) use constructed textiles to explore the notion of craft as an undervalued feminine pastime. She uses French spool knitting (a process which results in knitted tubes), to create mixed material installation pieces that are often personal or involve collaborations of people to evoke ‘cultural exchange’.4 The cross over of other design disciplines using traditional textile processes to realise

product, such as the *Bobbin Lace Lamp* (see Figure 2) by industrial
designer, Niels Van Eijk (Dutch), combines metal wire and fibre optics in a
traditional lace making knotting technique to add aesthetic value and
function through the effects of light.\(^5\) It is these extended ideas and the
break away from constructed textiles as being purely perceived as garment
outcomes, that has influenced my own research. The opportunity to engage
with the textile process, while diversifying the machine knitted fabric and it’s
potential to move beyond fashion has become an integral part of my
research direction.

The impact of technological advances and a renewed interest in the crafts
has become a major trend in the design and product development industry.
New materials and production abilities have allowed for innovation and a
reinvigorated appreciation of textile process from the perspective of
technology. The interest in textiles is imbedded in our culture, they are part
of our everyday life and the human response to a textile is personal,
familiar, sensory, and often nostalgic. Industrial processes have been
adapted to create the appearance of the hand-made as the consumer
desires this characteristic as a personal response to the product. The
current effects of globalisation and high quality faultless manufacturing
techniques have caused a response of individuals rejecting this notion and
trying to attain the personal, hand-crafted object. It is this trend that has

\(^5\) McFadden, Scanlan & Edwards, op. cit, pp. 70-72
greatly impacted on design manufacturing and seen partnerships forming between craftspeople and industry. These new partnerships have resulted in a new response to craft and the making process. Hand-made qualities have been incorporated into the design world evoking a more personal and sensory response to product from the consumer. By industrialising craft techniques, the perception of craft is being embraced, accepted and adapted for contemporary applications.

Developments in new materials with a range of performance characteristics have allowed artists and designers to adapt new technologies in cross-disciplinary ways, which combine the notion of art, craft and design. The overlaps created between traditional textile practices and other design industries, such as industrial design and architecture, have diversified the position of textiles. No longer are textiles only associated with traditional applications such as garments and homewares, they can became chairs, tables, works of art, building structures. Results of this new way of thinking are broad and diverse, as seen in the Lace Table by Marcel Wanders, (see Figure 3), where Swiss lace is stiffened with resin to make a table with function and the aesthetic value of traditional lace and the reaction it has to light passing through its structure and the architectural prototype by Peter Testa and Devyn Weiser (USA), The Carbon Tower, where experimentally carbon fibres are woven to create a concept building structure for an office block.

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6 Sarah E. Braddock Clarke and Marie O’Mahoney Techno Textiles 2 Revolutionary Fabrics for Fashion and Design (Thames and Hudson London 2007), p. 137
7 Chloe Colchester, Textiles Today, (Thames and Hudson, London, 2007), pp. 104-105
Currently a trend has also emerged amongst a range of designers and artists to reference the crafts of our past. The artist Anne Wilson (see Figure 4) deconstructs lace and then ‘reconstructs the lace by restitching and knotting threads’. Her aim is to re-create the common association with the craft medium of lace-making, while giving the reconstructed lace a contemporary aesthetic and context.\(^8\) The nostalgic and cultural references take us back to ‘security’ warmth and the ideas of home. This craft emergence has been linked with the turbulence created by September 11, 2001 and the unsettling of community that this created. The human response and desire to recapture this sense of community and the sharing of skills led to the emergence of hand knitting circles, where groups of knitters join together to share their love of knitting.\(^9\) This has also been influenced by the digital age where knitting blogs allow for the discussion and sharing of patterns and processes amongst new crafters. For example the group Cast Off, which was founded in 2000, is known for staging knitting ‘sit ins’, which are often anti establishment and reminiscent of protests held in the 1960’s.\(^{10}\)

This new interest in the knitted textile has allowed for fashion designers to reinvent hand knitting for the couture market. Designers such as Sandra Backlund (Sweden) and Clare Tough (UK) have taken the notion of the hand knitted sweater and given it a contemporary edge (see Figure 5). Exploiting the sculptural qualities of the hand knit, the bulk and the structure, has allowed for Backlund to create garments that are conceptual,

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\(^8\) McFadden, Scanlan & Edwards, op. cit, p. 136  
\(^9\) McFadden, Scanlan & Edwards, op. cit, pp. 8-9  
\(^{10}\) Colchester, op. cit., pp. 162-163
These avant-garde pieces have reinvigorated knitting not as secondary to, or a material of fashion but the primary driving factor of the outcome.

Radical Lace and Subversive Knitting an exhibition held in 2007 at the Museum of Arts and Design, New York, allowed artists and designers from a variety of disciplines to explore the concept of constructing lace and the process of knitting. Lace being defined as a cloth that possesses patterned interlocking structures which allows light to pass through them and knitted fabric where structures are constructed by a ‘single continuous yarn’\(^\text{12}\). The exhibited pieces throughout this exhibition explored both the textile product forms and the cloth itself. This exhibition opened many avenues for the possibilities of the traditional craft making processes of knitting and constructing textiles and diversified the application of these disciplines into a variety of outcomes. Radical Lace presented the potential of traditional crafts and needlework, which is commonly perceived as the ‘domain of grandmothers’,\(^\text{13}\) into a contemporary gallery environment. Concepts created for this exhibition were influenced by varied ideas from the impact

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\(^{12}\) McFadden, Scanlan & Edwards, op. cit, p. 9

of new fibres, materials and the craft-making process and their performance in a textile, to social and political commentary.

In 2006 an exhibition, *Blurring the Boundaries: Fashion Design Innovation in Contemporary Knitting* was held at the Fairfield City Museum and Gallery, Sydney, which exhibited a range of knitted pieces by local and international practitioners. Ultimately this was a fashion-focused exhibition; however, the performance of the knitted textile on the body was explored, allowing for the textiles exhibited to become more complex in structure and materials used. Works produced for this exhibition were varied and experimental, wearable and conceptual and demonstrated the diversity of the knitted structure. The domestic craft of knitting, often associated with dated hobbyist techniques was showcased with a new and contemporary meaning. Although, the exploration of fashion as art was the key intention of this exhibition, it was the assorted range of media, outcomes and the inherent qualities of the knitted structure that were transformed. Pieces celebrated the three-dimensional, sculptural forms which can be developed and shaped by hand-knitting in particular, and their ability to 'wrap, conceal, cocoon and transform the body'.

My own research direction was influenced by the limited presence of domestically machine knitted textiles in *Blurring the Boundaries* as this led me to consider and re-evaluate my process. Subsequently my intention became driven by the exploration of my working method on the machine. As I perceived a gap in the knitted work being produced, the potential of structures and sculptural qualities that could be achieved with combinations of materials and techniques became a more viable direction. This exhibition raised a few questions personally... why do we respond to the hand-knitted textile more readily than that produced by machine? Is the domestic machine knitted textile more aligned with industrially knitted fabrics? Does the process of machine knitting reduce the hand-made quality so easily achieved by hand knitting? Having already exhibited a body of work in 2005, *Increase* held at Artholes Gallery, as part of the L’Oreal arts programme, I started to consider the prospect of taking the domestic machine knitted textile back into a gallery environment, this time with more emphasis on the structural qualities of the domestically knitted textile, the

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use of materials and my own creative involvement in the construction process. This new direction reinvigorated my experimental process and allowed for trials to become more conceptual, fluid and exploratory in the context of the knitted cloth.

Another major influence on my own practice was the work of fashion designers such as Issey Miyake and Hussain Chalayan, who were renowned for taking fashion garments off the runway and into the gallery. For example the conceptual fashion exhibition *A-Poc Making* realised by Miyake at the Vitra Design Museum, Berlin 2001, where oversized sweaters and dresses came of the fabric roll as complete product. Miyake utilised new industrial knitting and weaving technology to create conceptual fashion pieces, pushing the boundaries of fashion design and creating a dramatic gallery installation with his oversized continuous pieces.\(^{15}\) Chalayan being known for his more ‘cerebral’ and theatrical approach to creating garments, which are often conceptual and play with ideas of transformation as in his mahogany *Skirt Table* piece, where a table transforms into a wearable skirt.\(^{16}\)

This idea of showcasing the garment, the choice of material, and the form and allowing it to speak in a gallery environment led me to consider applying this idea to my own outcomes. Allowing the structures and form of the textile to stand alone in a gallery environment, not necessarily as product ideas liberated the design application always integrated to my professional design process. My intention was to strip the knitted textile back from fashion product and consider the textile structure, surface and performance as the primary focus of my work. Often product concepts could be considered, however these were surprises, accidental and determined by the fabric form and shape.

The ability to separate my outcomes and process from purely a commercial application allowed exploration into materials, stitch structure and various surface treatments. The removal of boundaries created by production limitations and budgets within the local textile industry and my own professional practice allowed for a more creative and exploratory process. The structure of the textile and the aesthetics developed by the use of combination materials has driven much of my research, the outcomes

being varied and a celebration of the knitted cloth as a concept piece often devoid of a defined product outcome.

Throughout a diverse range of research, the discovery of textile exploration by designers such as Osamu Mita (Japan), Julie Denton (UK) and Sophie Roet (UK) inspired me to assess my own process. These designers in particular applied traditional craft making techniques in combination with new fibres and finishing techniques to create three-dimensional, sculptural fabrics. Mita being known for his experimentation of traditional Japanese textile processes combined with new materials (see Figure 6 & 7). His exploration of woven cloth using wool and new paper fibres and exposing these textiles to the traditional Japanese finishing technique of washing or felting, resulted in fabrics with raised three-dimensional surfaces. Latex coating effects explored by Denton onto woven cloth encapsulates three-dimensional surfaces, while Roet developed a surface treatment to ‘metallise’ a fabric so that it becomes changeable by hand, from crinkled to smooth. These designers, although working with end product in mind, relied on the innovation through their textile making process to be the forerunner of their process. It was the three-dimensional and sculptural qualities of their outcomes that interested me and became an important influence on my direction.

Figure 6 Osamu Mita Washi and Wool 1997 (Front)

Figure 7 Osama Mita Washi and Wool 1997 (Reverse)

18 Braddock Clarke & O’Mahony, op. cit., p. 60
The work of Mita, Denton and Roet and the processes these designers adapted were limited to the use of a woven substrate. It was this level of experimentation and innovation which appeared to be limited in the context of the knitted textile, as most knitting innovation was linked with shaping technology, fashion and new applications, such as medical textiles. In the early stages of research, the exploration of these types of finishing processes using a knitted substrate became of particular relevance and allowed for a variety of techniques, materials and applications to be considered. The main intention, at this point was to capture the knitted structure, affect the surface and stiffen the fabric, so that the inherent drape quality of the knitted fabric was altered. As in Mita’s work, felting became of particular interest and the contrasts which occurred between fibres that could be felted and non-standard materials which possessed their own stiffening qualities and did not react to the felting process.

Japanese culture is renowned for a rich tradition of producing textiles. Japanese innovations that combine the use of traditional process and new materials and technologies, by Mita’s contemporaries, such as Reiko Sudo and Chiyoko Tanaka, has also been a major influence on the assessment of my process and direction. The Nuno Corporation, a textile company based in Japan, reveals a great depth of textile innovation. Fabrics are constructed, exposed to various surface treatments and processes and often created using labour intensive hand techniques. The combinations of the traditional materials and surface treatments became influential to the early stages of my exploration, as again, examples of knitted textiles existed, but were limited. It also raised another consideration of how textiles are perceived locally. The Japanese value textiles for their cultural and traditional process and the aesthetic beauty of the cloth. Locally and in general terms, textiles are linked with function, fashion and crafts. The esteem for textiles apparent in the Japanese society is imbedded, while we are currently discovering and re-evaluating the place for textiles in our culture. By exhibiting the domestically knitted textile in a gallery environment and exposing the wider community to the aesthetic qualities of the textile structure, it became my intention to encourage a new

20 McCarty & McQuaid, op. cit., p. 11
appreciation in an Australian context, for the cloth as a creative and contemporary medium.

Although the place of technology has an important part to play in the design industry, it is the knitted textile in its structure that is the driving force behind my creative practice, similar to the response of an artist to their canvas. My own research became exploratory combining standard process with non-standard ideas to create concept fabrics with their own performance properties removed by the necessity of product outcomes. These concept fabrics, while sometimes linked or potentially linked to the use in product outcomes, are not the main objective of this research. Exploring the aesthetic qualities of the knitted textile and the combination of structures and materials became the focus of the fabrics developed. The interest in machine knitting in its own form, has allowed for my practice to evolve; to change the perception of domestic machine knitting and to create pieces which challenge the notion of art, craft and design.

**Design Process and Experimentation;**  
**The Manipulation of Surface**

Current trends in art and craft practice and the renewed interest in the knitted textile have impacted greatly on my perception of the knitted fabric. This new thought process allowed for the removal of making purely for product outcome, which within my professional practice, often entailed following a brief to address a fashion designer’s need for fabric to add to the aesthetic value and performance of their garment design. The realisation of the product, while challenging and part of my design process, often limited the ability to explore the potential structures and surfaces of knitting. Limitations often became apparent due to constraints during production, costing requirements and the need for fabrics to work in unison with garment style and shape. By eliminating the constant consideration of designing textile fabrics specifically for product outcomes allowed for a more fluid, creative and experimental progression.
This contemporary change in the attitude to textiles in general and the diversified processes of designers, from different disciplines of design, using textiles to link to their practice inspired an assessment of my own process. Experimentation and manipulation of knitted textiles became my first area of exploration. The intent was to incorporate new finishing and coating processes to the surfaces of knitted structure, adapting some of the ideas discovered in the processes of Mita and Denton. Initially, to minimise the labour involved with domestically machine knitting a variety of materials and fabrics to experiment with; I had considered industrially knitting a variety of fibres and fabrics for this early stage of research. While this seemed a logical solution, and as I had access to my own industrial knitting machine, this option proved to impact on my business’s sampling and production and also limited the types of fibres that could be controlled on the industrial machine. A variety of coating and finishing processes I had identified to be of interest became difficult to source locally, both in the context of accessing machinery and appropriate materials. Manufacturers were not open to allowing experimentation using their machinery, as the impact on their production outcomes would be interrupted and the risk of damaging equipment too costly.

While having a design background, my experiences in the visual arts, through previous visual arts study, led me to consider a more art-based approach considering surface coatings that could be accessible to me and be used in my studio environment. Early interest led me to consider the stiffening of the knitted textile surface. Capturing the structure of the textile and changing the traditional response to the fabric, from soft to hard or rough. It was also the trend of creating fabrics that appeared worn or aged due to surface treatments that impacted my choice of these processes. This concept had been discovered during my research phase where designers experimented with weathering techniques to achieve the appearance of worn fabrics. For example the rusted textiles produced by Reiko Sudo (Japan).\(^{21}\) As is most usual in the early stages of experimentation, the process became cyclic moving from one idea and aim to another and then back again.

\(^{21}\) McCarty & McQuaid, op. cit., pp. 24-25
The Domestic Knitting Machine

The domestic knitting machine allows for the production of fabrics more rapidly than by hand on knitting needles. A series of hook ended needles, are arranged on a ‘bed’ and are put into action by the use of a hand held ‘carriage’. This runs over the needles and depending on stitch structure and needle selection actions the needles to move accordingly. Yarn is fed into the carriage and automatically drops into the needle hooks as the carriage moves across the needle bed, to create the looped stitches, which construct the fabric. While this process can be instant, often hand manipulation is required to create more complex stitch structures and help control materials. Domestic knitting machines are aligned with the mechanics of industrial machines, but on a much more basic level and yet are still capable of producing a variety of knitted stitch structures. There are some knitting stitch structures that are more achievable by hand-knitting, such as Aran knitting where sections of knitting are crossed over to create plaited effects, while other stitches are more quickly produced on the machine. The quality of the finer, smooth machine knit offers a more modernist finish and allows for intricate textures and structures to be produced, while hand-knitting offers a bulkier, thicker texture which is reminiscent of traditional craft.

There are a variety of domestic knitting machines, the usual differences being brand and the capabilities of the machine being suitable for developing certain structures. Along with the differences in capabilities there are also different ‘gauges’ available, which determine the weight of the fabric, from finer gauge e.g. 8 (8 needles per inch), to heavier gauge e.g. 3 gauge (3 needles per inch). During my exploration a range of machines have been used to create desired effects, finally settling on the 7 gauge machine, (the most commonly used domestic machine), which became the most suitable for the types of materials sourced.

While there is literature available on the domestic knitting machine, such as John Allen’s Treasury of Machine Knitting Stitches and Susanna Lewis and Julia Weissman’s A Machine Knitter’s Guide to Creating Fabrics, these references are limited to stitch patterns and provide little explanation on the mechanics of the domestic machine. The understanding gained on how the knitting machine operates is a direct result of my use of the machine over a
twelve year period. Operating an industrial knitting machine also increased my understanding of the technical process, as it was imperative to understand the mechanics of the machine to better design fabrics and run production smoothly. My teaching practice has also resulted in an increased understanding of the mechanics of the knitting machine as instructing students on how to operate the machine and detect faults on the machine is an integral part of the knitting process. My Masters research draws on and simultaneously codifies much of this implicit practice based knowledge that has developed during my professional life.

**Materials**

Primarily, my intention was to work with standard fibres such as cotton, wool and viscose, however, through my industry contacts, I came across fibres that were often inexplicable, as there was no information as to what the fibre blends were. Often these yarns were left over from years of production and rather than discarding these, some of the knitting manufacturers I dealt with professionally allowed me to take them for the use in my research. Many of these fibres would be considered non-standard for fashion production and possessed unusual qualities, some shrunk and hardened when soaked in water, some were acetate blended textured yarns which possessed an almost fibre glass quality, others were hard nyons and others were unusual fibre blends. This discovery injected an interest with working with non-standard materials, and already having a personal interest in wires and having knitted wire jewellery pieces for a fashion show in 1997, wire became the next material to source. The earlier experience with wire knitting allowed me to appreciate that most wires are easier to handle when hand-knitted and knowing the capacities of the knitting machine, the wire needed to be malleable, rather than brittle (as some wires can be). The first types of wires sourced were electrical wires, fine copper enamelled wire that possessed both strength and flexibility. I did a great deal of testing with a variety of jewellery and beading wires, with mixed results as most of these snapped under pressure. I had also sourced a variety of solder wires and stainless steel wires from a company in Hong Kong when I had visited in 2000, which offered mixed results when first knitted, however, with some experimentation, became manageable.
Wire knitting and weaving is not a new concept, in fact a few artisans use the process of working with knitted or woven wire in their disciplines, and however, in most cases when working with knitting, these are hand-knitted and simple in stitch structure. The jeweller Vicky Shukuroglou (Aus) artist Arline Fisch and the textile designer Ruth Lee (UK) all work with constructed wires to make conceptual jewellery pieces. Shukuroglou uses woven wire in combination with natural elements such as horse hair, shells and stones to create delicate sculptural objects, while Fisch works with hand knitted wires to create dramatic jewellery pieces. Lee also predominately works using the hand-knit process, where the wire is easier to control. In her book *Contemporary Knitting for Textile Artists*, Lee focuses on the process of hand-knitting wires to create fashioned and shaped three-dimensional pieces. This is a more manageable process on knitting needles, as the stress on the wire is reduced, while once converted to the machine the weight and friction caused by the movement of the carriage causes the wire to break, unless the structure is straight forward, for example a jersey or rib fabric. Once structures on the machine become more complex and require continuous movement by the carriage the ability to control the wire breakage is more difficult. The advantages, however, of working wire on the machine is the capacity to more easily combine fibres and produce a finer smoother finish, while hand-knitting wire can often appear irregular due to the nature of the material and process.

While sourcing suitable wires and new fibres was difficult locally, I was able to purchase some materials from suppliers I used within my professional practice; this was particularly useful for some unusual sample yarns and standard yarns, such as wool. This process involved experimentation, often with frustrating results as time to receive fibres, followed by the lack of performance or difficulty to handle on the machine, meant that new fibres had to be sourced. During this period of exploration, I began to find my work changing direction and started to explore achieving stiffened effects by coating and dipping the surface of the textile rather than relying on the material.

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Capturing the Structure

In the early stages, experimentation with media such diluted PVA glue allowed for the knitted structure to be spray coated, stiffened and, to an extent, moulded to create 3D forms. While the outcomes of this process were mixed there was also the problems faced with the aesthetic values of the textile and the limitations of fibres that could be used due this concern.

Likewise the outcomes of latex dipping and coating were unique. This process was inspired by the use of latex in the work of Denton. The loss of the tactile quality of the surface, limited the notion of the textile as a malleable, draping cloth. Although the structure was captured the rubberised texture was not necessarily a tactile quality that suited the nature of the fabric. The side effects of the latex also eroded certain fibres such as wool over time, which caused breaks within the structures. Again the aesthetic outcomes of the latex and the unavoidable yellowing of the textile surface limited the choice of fibre, as aesthetically, this became difficult to control and the results lost the aesthetic quality the uncoated fabric had possessed. While some of these stiffening processes allowed for the isolation of the knitted structure it became apparent there was a need to return to the knitted structure and consider the application of more traditional processes, which worked aesthetically with the fibre rather than against the fibres.

The process of felting by which untreated wool fibres are forced to expand when exposed to a combination of water, temperature change and friction, created slightly stiffened fabrics, which maintained some of the natural qualities of the knitted textile. The drape was still apparent, however the contrast between materials to create dense areas, which were felted with transparent fibres, which would not felt, became an area of exploration, which allowed the knitted structure to be maintained. The flexibility of the fabric in combination with areas of light and shade opened a new area of experimentation into creating effects that utilised the contrast between opacity and transparency and firm and soft. The results of this process led to the exploration of these contrasts of fibres more extensively as the soft nature of the wool fibre was maintained while often the contrasting material choice, being an enamelled wire, gave the fabric inherent mouldable and transparent qualities.
Worn and Weathered

The woven textile outcomes by the artisan Chiyoko Tanaka (Japan) became influential on the selection of processes explored in the early stage of development in my own work (see Figure 8). Tanaka explores the surface of the weave to create the appearance of worn and aged fabrics by exposing the cloth to stone and soil rubbing. This results in fabrics with irregular surfaces that appear aged and discoloured by the reaction to the selected material used to rub down the surface. The transfer print technique developed by Reiko Sudo (Japan) used in her Scrapyard series (see Figure 9), which involves a process of printing rusted nails and scrap metals onto cloth, also became influential as this again was a process that was limited to the use of the woven textile.

While working with enamelled wire to create machine knitted structures a development point of further exploration, was the effects of patination. Patination is the erosion and change of colour that occurs to certain metals due to oxidisation and rusting. It is the aged appearance of the metal which I wanted to replicate in the wire knitted textile. This process became of interest, as this inherent weathered quality was an aesthetic that naturally occurs during the ageing process of metal. To explore these effects, there

26 McCarty & McQuaid, op. cit., pp. 24-25
were different forms of rusting and patination that were trialled. Patina paints that are used for interior and exterior finishing effects allowed the effects of patina green, blue, black and rust to be painted onto knitted wire and standard fibre combination textiles. Boiling the textiles with salt and vinegar also eroded some wires and changed the nature of original wool yarn colours; while burying and rust baths had mixed results, some fabrics over eroded while others became discoloured and stained with rust marks. The results here were interesting and allowed for reflection upon process. The viability of some of these processes was too difficult to control without destroying the integrity of the fabric. Boiling became the most controllable application and the discolouration of the silver plated copper wires changing from silver to deep green, was the most aesthetic outcome.

The painted patina effects interested me at first, as the option to apply the treatment to the surface could be controlled, however; again this technique was faced with mixed aesthetic results according to the wire and fibre combinations of the knit. The nature of the paint when applied to a standard fibre such as mercerised cotton also changed the flexibility of the fabric by stiffening the surface. While the stiffening of the fabric was an effect I was initially interested in, the handle of the fabric was too compromised and rough. This became a less appealing outcome as the haptic and malleable quality of the fabric was lost.

Figure 10 Esther Paleologos  
Patina Paint test 2003

Figure 11 Esther Paleologos  
Boiled Patina test 2003
During this initial testing phase, I also explored ideas of exposing knitted surfaces to heat treatments. Knits constructed with blends of copper wire and wool, wire and cotton and wire and acetate, were baked in a conventional oven (see Figure 12). This process was easy to control and the resultant fabrics became yellowed. The wool and cotton became a pale yellow and the acetate a dark golden brown, at longer periods of exposure time the fibres often burnt out which left the wire knitted areas exposed and gave the appearance of an eroded and worn fabric. The outcomes of this process were appealing and the variations of colour and the aged appearance of the surface became a process I utilised for the development of pieces for *Increase*.

![Figure 12 Esther Paleologos Baked Patchwork 2005](image)

Along with the idea of baking also came using a heat gun onto polyester knitted fabrics. When this process is applied to a woven substrate three-dimensional surfaces are created, due to semi-melting of the heat exposed areas of the fabric. When applied to the knitted structure, it became difficult to control due to the gauge, or openness of the fabric and this was a process that was quickly abandoned.

Considerations of cruder finishing treatments were also tested with mixed results. While experimenting with changing the surface of the textile, I became interested in the contrasting effects of matte and shiny and exposed matte knitting fibres, such as wool to sprayed lacquers. This created effects of subtle gloss and also affected the fabric by stiffening. The
lacquered effects became more successful when applied to fibres such as nylon as in *Nylon Pockets*, (see Figure 13) where the combination of nylon and cotton was knitted in a pocket fabric with inserts of paper. The lacquer reacted well and the surface became slightly stiffened; yet the appearance of the fabric was only subtly changed. Along with the lacquered effects and an interest in metals and knitting with wires, sterling silver sprays were also applied to some surfaces using a masking technique to change the natural colour of copper wire to silver. This allowed for stencilled shapes to be applied to the surface and potentially repeat patterning to be introduced.

![Figure 13 Esther Paleologos Nylon Pockets 2005](image)

*Increase*[^27]

*(See Appendix 1)*

While there were many diverse processes explored, (and some testing and experimentation not mentioned here), a period of refining these ideas occurred with the view to exhibit. The intention for *Increase* was to exhibit a

[^27]: *Increase*, (March 2005, Artholes Gallery Fitzroy, in conjunction with the LMMF arts programme)
variety of processes, outcomes and finishes, before serious reflection. A variety of swatches were developed, some naturally remained as concept pieces, while some, due to the knitted structure and materials, became concept product pieces, due to their natural form, for example Circle Ruffle Shrug (see Figure 14). Public reaction to the work was positive and resulted in pieces being sold, mainly the pieces which were viewed as decorative, or as wall pieces. Some of the reaction questioned the function of the textile, as the natural perception of the knitted cloth was the obvious link to fashion and garment. This was not at all discouraging, as it challenged not only the viewer, but also my own perception of knitting. This became a particularly important influence on the next phase of experimentation, as it supported my intention to explore the concept of knitting as an art form. My own link to developing knitted textiles for product outcomes started to dissolve and the aesthetic of the textile became the catalyst for the next development phase.

![Figure 14 Esther Paleologos Circle Ruffle Shrug 2004](image)

As it became clear the making process had become more personalised and my own aesthetic application was integral to this, re-assessment of the work produced for Increase was done. The accidental effects achieved by the material and knitted structure combinations became increasingly important, while the finishing surface coatings and dipping processes seemed to take away from the natural performance and effects that were created within the fabric. It became apparent, that materials and structures
in combination were the element of the knitting process I was most responsive to. The effects of light to create shadow, the positive and negative space that could be explored within a knitted textile and the combination and contrast of opacity and transparency.

*Increase 2: The Return to Structure*  
*(see Appendix 2)*

After much re-visiting of initial experiments and tests, my own experience when working on the knitting machine became the main focus. This involved a second period of sourcing new materials and exploring structures more aggressively, so that simpler techniques became more exaggerated and allowed for the performance of the stitches to give the cloth drape, movement, changeability and aesthetic value. The exploration of the structure, three-dimensionality, and positive and negative space became more influential on my design process, while the manipulation of the surface via the use of finishing process had lost its initial appeal.

The combination of various gauges (thicknesses) of wire with standard fibres such as mercerised cotton and wool, delivered the effects I had ultimately wanted to achieve; mouldable flexible fabrics, three-dimensional surfaces and haptic qualities, became the impetus for the next stage of development. In the earlier stages this involved a greater depth of experimenting on the machine and testing structures and the reaction of materials to certain knitting techniques. A great deal of problem solving and developing strategies occurred to prevent wires from snapping at high points of tension within structures. Mostly jersey structures were explored, as the inherent quality of the fabric and the knitted structure of short row patterning could be developed and controlled more easily. Short row patterning is a technique where sections of the fabric are isolated and knitted separately from the body of the fabric, which creates added length, or three-dimensional effects.

Being able to source new fibres, such as a stainless steel wool blend yarn and some enamelled copper wires with a better selection of gauges and colour, enabled a more aesthetic application to the structural explorations.

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*Increase 2, (Brunswick Street Gallery, July 3-16 2009)*
The need to manipulate the surface with coatings or latex dipping for example was reduced, as the textile possessed its own mouldable and flexible quality when removed from the machine. This allowed for the development of fabrics that could be shaped and manipulated by hand.

A series of ideas began to develop during this initial experimentation. Fabrics that appeared ruffled, fabrics that had three-dimensional surfaces, fabrics with opaque and transparent contrasts, fabrics that are pieced together, (patchworked) and fabrics that possess their own form i.e. vessels, (a concept also explored in *Increase*), all featured in the work developed for *Increase 2*. These ideas were the impetus for development, sometimes as sole concepts or in combination with each other. The process became more experimental, fluid and personal. My own making experience and working on the machine became a more creative and personal process. This skill was what I wanted to explore, the implications of the machine allowing for the structure to develop. Often what came off the machine surprised or disappointed, but with each swatch the structure of the fabric and the combination of materials became more refined.

*Increase 2* became the forum for displaying the outcomes of this research. The idea of the knitted textile evoking an emotive response from the viewer. The sculptural quality created by the use of media, and the ability to exhibit pieces without the necessity for product connotations. The effects of the selected structures also became important; the interplays of light, of transparent or three-dimensional areas added a new dimension to the textile itself. The intricacy of the stitch and the fine, smooth quality achieved on the machine references the hand-made, yet also links to the familiar commercial knitwear in fashion

As the work for *Increase 2* evolved the endless possibilities of structures and material combinations became exciting. With each idea discovered, there are countless variations of scale, placements and stitches that are possible. The knitting experience became more involved and the process of making and testing gave me the momentum to develop the outcomes for exhibition. The work developed was the result of a more fluid approach to my practice and my intention to explore the domestically knitted textile as a valid creative discipline.
The continued appeal of knitted wires and materials that possess their own rigidity allowed for pieces to evolve which are more sculptural in form. Some pieces are flexible and changeable depending on the manipulation of the fabric by hand once removed from the machine. The ability to stretch and mould the cloth and the sense of touch across the variation of materials became a personal response to the fabrics created. While some structures remain simpler in stitch and technique, the intention was to allow the materials to perform in reaction to the element of hand manipulation, for example *Hourglass Ruffles*, (see Figure 15) where repeated strips of Jersey are knitted and then hand twisted to create hourglass shapes. The use of the wire allows for these forms to remain rigid, while in contrast the stainless steel wool blend yarn used in *Hourglass Ruffles 2* (see Figure 16) demonstrates the same technical process, however the outcome is softer and the twisting results in forms with more drape.

![Figure 15 Esther Paleologos Hourglass Ruffles 2009](image1.png)  ![Figure 16 Esther Paleologos Hourglass Ruffles 2 2009](image2.png)

While the finishing surface processes explored for the work produced for *Increase*, such as the latex coating, had been abandoned, it was some of the structures and effects initially knitted became important to developing the work for *Increase 2*. The use of the short row patterning technique, which creates empty spaces within the cloth, allowed me to explore the effects of positive and negative space and the possibilities of three-dimensional structures. *3D Shift Piece* (see Figure 17) explores the concept of raised knitted areas amongst a structure that has negative space. The three-dimensional surface and the interplay of light to cast shadows is the result of the short row technique. This approach, utilising a variation of the short row technique, explored in *Twisted Mesh* (see Figure 18), where the combination of the enamelled copper wire and the stainless steel wool
blend yarn creates raised twisted areas due the placement and reaction of the materials to one another.

Figure 17 Esther Paleologos 3D Shift Piece 2009

Figure 18 Esther Paleologos Twisted Mesh 2009

*Increase 2* was the result of my intention to diversify domestically knitted textiles into concepts that combine the notion of art craft and design. The outcomes exhibited explore the textile and its aesthetic value in a gallery environment. My objective was to challenge the viewer and to celebrate the knitted cloth as an artistic medium. It has inspired the question of how are knitted textiles perceived, and ultimately how do I perceive my own making process.
**Conclusion: Where to Now?**

In the preceding pages I have outlined the research processes that have produced my final range of knitted pieces. As a support to my practice, I have engaged in research, through texts and electronic media, into the current shifts of the position of knitting in an art and design context. I have also described the processes of experimentation that I followed during my research. In the next few pages, I discuss the outcomes of this research, potential developments and applications for my own work practice and for the discipline.

The vast amount of experimentation in the early stages, although frustrating at times, offered valuable hands-on experience and allowed me to engage with materials, stitch structures and expanded my skill base. However the disappointments I encountered should not be seen as a waste, as these led me to my final research outcomes. It is these outcomes which have allowed me to re-evaluate my process and to consider future directions for expanding the potential of machine knitting. The outcomes produced through experimentation, are not only relevant to my own practice, but have the potential to speak to a variety of disciplines, including art, craft and design. My research has been further informed and driven by my accumulated implicit knowledge from industry and teaching roles, alongside design and creative intention. This varied process of experimentation with materials and process has opened up number of valid design and aesthetic options which have allowed me to create a range of machine knitted and crafted objects that have been well received when exhibited in a gallery context.

The experimental and cyclic process encountered during this research project has resulted in a variety of outcomes, both influential personally and professionally. The definition of domestic machine knitting has evolved from the design tool I once used in both my teaching and design practice to a more creatively viable medium. It is this new interpretation and personal response to the making process which has informed my teaching practice, encouraging students to approach design in a more experimental and fluid way. While instructing students how to design appropriately for product is an important application for industry, it has become increasingly important to me to demonstrate the possibilities and potential of the knitting machine.
Better management of non-standard materials and combinations of complex stitch structures has been beneficial in teaching concept projects for experimental undergraduate design studies, which are linked with the School of Architecture and Industrial Design (RMIT), thus extending the discourse around textiles to other design media and disciplines. Students are exposed to considering textiles beyond the common association of fabric for fashion. The introduction of these projects has challenged students to reassess the application of textiles and explore surface and structure and textile aesthetics and performance. In turn, allowing for this conceptual approach to be applied to projects, has allowed for greater reflection into my own teaching delivery and the encouragement of pushing the boundaries when constructing a knitted textile.

A direct outcome of my research has been to re-evaluate my own design practice. While I had always used a domestic knitting machine to problem solve and develop fabrics for clients, there had always been constraints during this process, due to time, production limitations and ultimately costing. My own practice had started with the production of limited bespoke, speciality pieces, however, as the business grew, investment in an industrial knitting machine was needed. This expansion of my technical resources was intended to keep up with the scale of production and to limit the physicality of domestic knitting. However, with this commercial production compromised the creative aspects of my knitting. Now through my research, this creative dimension to my practice has been rediscovered and has awakened new possibilities for both my own work and for knitted textiles as a craft and design discipline. I believe that the project has unlocked the personal response and sheer scope and potential of what can be achieved via my process, not purely for a design outcome, but as an expression of art.

This re-established interest in my creative making process, has led me to contemplate that perhaps I have only scratched the surface of what can be achieved. The ability to experience the process from the perspective of exploring media and stitch is a vast subject matter and the variations and possibilities of domestic machine knitting are endless. With the ability to more easily source materials, there are many more avenues with the potential to explore. The outcomes of this research have been predominately developed utilising the single bed of the machine as this had
offered expansive ideas and variations, however the potential to convert structures and utilise double bed (a process which engages a second flat bed of needles so that plain and purl stitches are achieved simultaneously on one side of the fabric), is one avenue that could further be explored. This process had been tested during the experimental phases of this project and while the outcomes were interesting, the possibilities available with the single bed short row technique proved to provide a great deal of variations and concepts to explore. The short row technique also allows for the development of fabrics with positive and negative space within the textile which was an aesthetic concept I wanted to utilise. This also allowed for the chance to better learn how to manage material combinations. The potential to further explore stitch structures has become a definite consideration as there are still many techniques available to be exploited. By developing these concept fabrics further, the application and the adaptation of the knitted textile into a creative medium can also be expanded.

The outcomes exhibited throughout my research have been varied and include multiple concepts and ideas. While this has been beneficial to my personal process, there are many concepts which have emerged. Especially noteworthy are the interplays of shadows created by the textile and the spatial potential of the fabric, particularly if fabrics are increased in scale and treated as gallery installations and wall works. As a result of exhibiting *Increase 2*, I have been approached to develop interior decorative screens for the use in a graphic design studio and contemporary furniture store. The great potential and the variety of knitted structures which can be developed and the ability to further exaggerate the positive and negative space within the textile, would be suitable for these types of applications, while maintaining the quality and integrity of the textile. The favourable response to these works in *Increase 2* has led to the consideration for further experimentation and the implications of creating larger scale pieces which utilise the effects of light and texture in an interior environment.

The ability to treat the machine knitted textile, which is usually associated with a fashion product and industrial application, as a medium with creative potential has opened up a myriad of possibilities. Domestically knitted textiles have the potential to be celebrated as a medium beyond the
traditional associations of a fabric designed for the use in fashion. The inherent qualities of the fabrics, the pattern created by stitch structures and materials have the potential to be explored further and again being taken to the gallery. This hopefully begins a dialogue and asks a question about the aesthetic appeal of knitting, not in the traditional realm of craft, but as a medium with decorative and aesthetic value.

While it was not the focus of my research project to explore product concept, due to some of the natural outcomes and performances of the fabrics developed, the potential to utilise these fabrics as product concepts has emerged. Due to the laborious nature of the making process, product outcomes could be developed which would remain as purely ‘wearable art’, body adornment or avant garde concept pieces. This would allow for products to be specialty, hand-made and individually created.

Although the earlier processes explored during this research were abandoned due to aesthetic and tactile considerations, these processes also have the potential to be revisited. The greater control and ability to source materials has allowed for a better aesthetic finish, which with appropriate surface treatments could be effective. These processes, at the time were often frustrating, as the results were often difficult to control or aesthetically unattractive. There exists the potential to layer knitted surfaces with various surface treatments with the intent of creating art concept pieces. The implications of this option to expand the concept further becomes more exciting and the possibilities of multiple processes and layered textile pieces would add another dimension to the cloth.

The possible directions that have been indicated by the outcomes of this research have illustrated an increasing desire to continue working with the domestically knitted textile as an art medium. Although this is a challenging prospect, exposing the viewer to consider knitting in a new way allows me to share my appreciation of the aesthetic and decorative value of the cloth. This approach also continues the dialogue between art, design and craft technique and the ability work with these considerations in unison to create decorative and conceptual outcomes.

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Throughout this research project the invaluable experience of exploring domestic knitting and my response to the aesthetic and performance qualities of the textile has inspired me to continue on this path. Liberating my personal practice from the limitations of the design industry has allowed me to expand my knowledge and work more experimentally and creatively. Introducing the domestically knitted textile to an art gallery environment, has not only altered my perception of the domestic knitting process, but has allowed me to align this medium with other expressions of art-making, and to start a dialogue and response to the performance of the textile in a decorative context.
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**Additional References & Activities**

Textile View Magazine  (Metropolitan Publishing, Amsterdam), Quarterly publications

Collezioni Trends (Logos Publishing, Bologna) Quarterly publications

Exhibited at and attended the New York Textile Design trade show, Direction August, 2005


Collaborative freelance design work with fashion industry clients, spanning 10 years
Appendices

Appendix 1  Increase  Exhibition dates 17\textsuperscript{th}–30\textsuperscript{th} March 2005

Increase is an exhibition by Masters student and textile designer, Esther Paleologos. With a strong interest in constructed textile design, she explores the knitted fabric, combining traditional concepts and applications with innovative surface and finishing treatments. Fabrics are machine knitted, crocheted, crafted and embellished, using eclectic combinations of fibres such as acetate, nylon, wool and enamelled wire. Each piece explores subtle knitted textures and colours, which are then distressed, distorted, weathered and layered using a variety of surface coating effects. The textiles are exposed to resin and latex coats, patina and heat treatments, creating unique fabrics, which are then developed into innovative fabric concepts.

Inspired by the idea of collage, textiles are patch worked, constructed and reconstructed, while celebrating the diverse textures and tactile elements achieved through the process of creating the fabric. The designer explores the contrasts between soft and firm and transparent and opaque, with unique layers of pattern and texture. In some cases, the textile layers become three dimensional, while remaining light and transparent.

The works are sculpted and formed according to material and surface process. Pieces are adaptable, changeable and they can be viewed in different ways.

Increase opens at Artholes Gallery, in conjunction with LMMF arts programme presented by MINI 114 Gertrude St. Fitzroy, on Friday the 18\textsuperscript{th} of March 2005, 6pm-9pm

Appendix 2  Increase 2 2009 Artists statement

My intention is to expand and challenge the traditional perception of knitting and to blur the notion of art, craft and design.

The defining characteristic of my work is the exploration of the inherent qualities of the machine knitted textile. Process is manipulated through the use of materials and structures exaggerated to change the performance of the fabric. My personal interest lies in the interplay of positive and negative space, three-dimensional constructions and contrasts of opacity and transparency. Throughout the process of constructing the textile, I have allowed the materials and the knitted technique to respond to the combination of non-standard and standard materials to create often sculptural and changeable pieces. The integration of these materials effects the natural movement and drape of the textile, which can often change in form when manipulated by hand. It is this interaction and response to the fabric, through the sense of touch, which drives many of these outcomes.

Esther Paleologos

Increase 2
Opens 3 Jul at 6pm. Runs to 16 Jul 2009
322 Brunswick St. Fitzroy. Opp Bar Open
Hours Wed-Sun 11-6pm P: 0419 399 478
mark@brunswickstreetgallery.com.au
www.brunswickstreetgallery.com.au

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1. **Grid** 2008  Wire, wool, stainless steel wool blend
2. **Vessel** 2008  Electrical copper wire and wool
3. **Ruffle Circles** 2009  Wire, wool and stainless steel wool blend
4. **Ruffle** 2009  Wire, wool and mercerised cotton
5. **Pocket Flowers** 2009  Nylon, mercerised cotton, paper yarn and stainless steel wool blend
6. **Woven Diamonds** 2008  Wire, wool and nylon tape yarn
7. **Bobbles** 2009  Wire, stretch lycra, nylon
8. **Hourglass Ruffles 2** 2009  Stainless steel wool blend
9. **Form** 2007  Electrical copper wire, mercerised cotton and lambswool, felted
10. **Hourglass Ruffles** 2009  Stainless steel wire and mercerised cotton
11. **Twisted Ruffle** 2009  Stainless steel wool blend
12. **Circle Flower Patchwork** 2009  Wire and mercerised cotton
13. **Woven Grid** 2008  Wire and vintage fabric
14. **Patchwork** 2009  Wire and wool
15. **3D Shift** 2007  Electrical copper wire and mercerised cotton
16. **Scribble Flower Patchwork** 2006  Silver solder wire, patina finish
image gallery

1. Grid 2008  Wire, wool, stainless steel wool blend
2. Vessel 2008  Electrical copper wire and wool
3. Ruffle Circles 2009  Wire, wool and stainless steel wool blend
4. Ruffle 2009  Wire, wool and mercerised cotton
5. Pocket Flowers 2009  Nylon, mercerised cotton, paper yarn and stainless steel wool blend
6. Woven Diamonds 2008  Wire, wool and nylon tape yarn
7. Bobbles 2009  Wire, stretch lycra, nylon
8. Hourglass Ruffles 2 2009  Stainless steel wool blend
9. Form 2007  Electrical copper wire, mercerised cotton and lambswool, felted
10. Hourglass Ruffles 2009  Stainless steel wire and mercerised cotton
11. Twisted Ruffle 2009  Stainless steel wool blend
12. Circle Flower Patchwork 2009  Wire and mercerised cotton
14. Patchwork 2009  Wire and wool
15. 3D Shift 2007  Electrical copper wire and mercerised cotton