



Women of cloth

Discover the passion behind the woven, stitched and manipulated pieces by our three textiles artisans – Elizabeth Delfs, Amber Ward and Trish Bygott

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Building beauty

A love for perfect imperfection is behind Elizabeth Delf's artistic built forms

As a student of fashion and textile design at Curtin University, Elizabeth Delfs was attracted to sculptural things. And architecture. And art and music. Costumes, craft and photography, too. Indeed, her unwillingness to limit herself to one discipline became part of her oeuvre.

"I like building things," says the 27-year-old, whose work with industrial fabrics and spray paint sits between textiles, fashion, art and theatre, with a deep reverence for beauty.

She uses materials such as fly wire, rubber and foam, applying colour and origami folds to adorn and shape them. She's been playing with tulle, spray painted and layered into diaphanous sculptures in warm, autumnal hues. They could be equally at home adorning a body as suspended from a ceiling, but a move away from 'worn' creations distinguishes Elizabeth's more recent work.

"I found myself not engaged with or interested in what the fashion industry



LEFT Elizabeth stenciling onto tulle in her Fremantle studio. ABOVE Works for her 2010 Revolutions exhibition at Freerange Gallery (top) and Beyond Garment show during the 2010 Perth Fashion Festival (below).

presents as beautiful, so I started looking at other cultural references to beauty,” she says.

Rather than the often frivolous, always trend-based facets of fashion, Elizabeth aligns more with the Japanese wabi-sabi aesthetic (exploring imperfection and impermanence), and the Hebrew definition of beauty that translates as ‘glow’ or ‘bloom’.

Ironically, her work is founded in pattern cutting, another aspect of fashion she dislikes. She enjoys garments, but her work is more

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‘built’ than stitched. “While some of the structures are quite geometric and have hard and sharp lines, they’re also quite soft and diffused,” she says.

Less than five years out of university, she is blazing a trail with an outside-the-box practice. “At uni, I realised what I was making could fit into an exhibition format, or a design or a craft format. I wasn’t stuck on one thing.”

Not only are her influences broad, but also her reach. One of her first exhibitions was in

2005 in Munich, part of a Talente survey of emerging art and craft practitioners. She has done internships with two artists in New York, exhibited in a cultural program of the L’Oreal Melbourne Fashion Festival and completed residencies and exhibitions in Perth. In May, she will begin a six-month residency in Berlin thanks to Artsource’s Go Anywhere initiative, which is funded by local philanthropists.

Before she leaves, she will be one of 40 international guests delivering a talk on

her practice at the agIdeas conference at International Design Week in Melbourne. More than 10,500 attendees are expected over the three days, many highly informed about design. She’s collaborating with Melbourne curator Kate Rhodes to ensure she gives the best 20-minute presentation possible.

That may involve transporting her audience, via their imaginations, to her studio at the Old Customs House in Fremantle, where small, colourful maquettes adorn the walls,

and ceilings awaiting future lives as bigger things. Incongruous materials collect in bundles, and the smell of spray paint lingers around hand-cut stencils.

“Most of the materials I use are somewhat ephemeral,” says Elizabeth. “I’m attracted to materials that have sculptural properties, but are also quite malleable – somewhere between a hard material and a really soft fabric.”

And fashion hasn’t fallen entirely out of favour. “I like the idea of making a cameo guest artist appearance with a fashion designer for a season,” she says. Collaborating with Bjork is on the aspirational ‘to do’ list.

Her current project is for architectural firm Coda. In mid 2011, she and three other artists will construct installations for a new Housing Foundation building in Newcastle Street, Northbridge. She’s made mock-ups of her design from fly wire, but the finished product will be perforated aluminium, folded and suspended from the ceiling in a void space.

“It’s the biggest project I’ve done and the first time I’ve translated my work into such a scale and into that kind of material,” says Elizabeth. It’s a far cry from calico, but when it comes to her cross-disciplinary approach borne of textile design beginnings, it’s on-trend. Elizabeth Delfs elizabethdelfs.com.