

**Concept-Material-Process:  
Exegesis in the Creative Practice of Jessica Steytler**

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Art in Fine Arts, Centre for Visual Art,  
University of KwaZulu-Natal: Pietermaritzburg.  
October 2016

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## Declaration

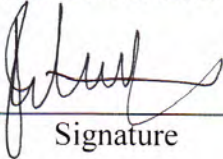
Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Art in Fine Arts, in the School of Arts, Centre for Visual Art at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus, South Africa.

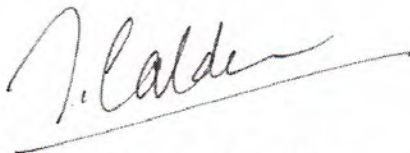
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3. This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
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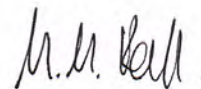
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16 October 2016

Date

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Special thanks are given to Christo Rabie and Etta Judson of the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria, for communicating with me and granting me permission to reproduce photos of the *Voortrekker Tapestries* in my dissertation, and to Tricia Moodley of the KwaZulu-Natal Museum in Pietermaritzburg, for sharing her knowledge and expertise on cataloguing and studying insects, and for showing me the entymology collection at the museum.

The financial assistance of the Centre for Visual Arts at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, through the support of the Rita Strong Scholarship towards this Masters degree and associated research, is hereby acknowledged and I confirm that the opinions expressed, content and conclusions determined are my personal submissions as those of the artist/author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the Centre for Visual Arts and/or the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

The financial assistance of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, through the support of a Postgraduate Scholarship Award, is acknowledged.

My special appreciation goes to my family for their endless support of my artistic career and their encouragement in my pursuit of this opportunity.

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Thank you to my friends, inside and outside of the Centre for Visual Arts, for their understanding and encouragement, for sharing inspiration with me, and for contributing such a beautiful array of insects to my collection.

## Abstract and keywords

This practice-based research project incorporates practical and theoretical components which consider the relationships between the concepts, media and processes of the creative practice of the researcher, Jessica Steytler. The studio-based research focuses on combining needlework, textiles and porcelain as the key media of the study, which are used to make mixed-media artworks. The main concepts of the practice include literal and metaphorical interpretations of metamorphosis, catharsis and healing, and issues of gender-based violence in South Africa.

A theoretical framework integrating feminist art, art/craft debates and materiality theory locates the study. In-depth examinations of the gendered histories of needlework, textiles and porcelain provide insight into the historical materiality of the media. This interrogation is bolstered with the studio-based research that reflects on the contributions of the physical qualities and processes of the key media. The implications of these media as ‘craft’ materials are considered in the fine art context of this degree. Judy Chicago’s feminist artwork *The Dinner Party* provides a precedent for the combining of the key, ‘craft’, media in a fine art context. Janice Lester’s *Personal Space* and Faith Wilding’s *Crocheted Environment* in the exhibition *Womanhouse* are referenced as installations that make use of the domestic, home environment as exhibition space. Louise Bourgeois’ practice contributes metaphors of cellular structures and the symbolism of sewing as repair.

The studio practice of this research is discussed using a reflective approach that accounts for the insider knowledge of the researcher. This discussion pays careful attention to what the physical and historical materiality of the key media and their processes contribute to the enquiry. Thumbnail images are included alongside textual discussion to illustrate the close relationships between the media and processes and the concepts of the practice. Issues that arose during the set up of the final exhibition installation are additionally examined to highlight the importance of practitioners developing display tactics that are appropriate for their work. It is concluded that the approach taken in this research could be used by practitioners in any creative field.

## Keywords

Needlework, embroidery, porcelain, textiles, feminist art, art/craft debates, materiality, process, metaphor, metamorphosis, catharsis, healing, domestic, exhibition, installation, practice-based research, Judy Chicago, Louise Bourgeois, *Womanhouse*.

## Prefatory Note

The following procedures have been adopted.

1. In this research the creative practice of the researcher, Jessica Steytler, is the focus of discussion. As a result the first person is used when referring to my own work and concepts, and when incorporating my own experiential knowledge into discussions.
2. The Harvard short form of referencing and citations is used in this text. A list of references cited in the text appears at the end of the dissertation.
3. This dissertation consists of three chapters with subsections, in which text and thumbnail images are combined. As a result there are 103 pages in total, although the word length falls within prescribed limits for the requirements of the degree.
4. In Chapter Two images of the *Voortrekker Tapestries* and works by Louise Bourgeois, Judy Chicago, Janice Lester and Faith Wilding appear in-text, alongside the relevant discussion within the text.
5. In Chapter Three thumbnail images of my own work correspond with the relevant discussion of the work within the text.
6. Single large images of my completed works discussed in Chapter Three appear in Appendix 1.
7. All photographs of my work are taken by me, Jessica Steytler; for all other photographs the photographer is credited in the caption, except in the cases of Figures 5, 6 and 8, where the photographer is not cited and/or unknown by the original source.
8. Dimensions of complete works are given at the beginning of each discussion in Chapter Three and in the captions of the images in Appendix 1. Measurements are given in centimetres in the following order: Height x Width x Depth.
9. In-text images are labeled as 'Figure' while images that appear in Appendix 1 are labeled as 'Illustration'. Figures and Illustrations are numbered consecutively. A List of Figures and List of Illustrations are supplied after the Table of Contents.
10. In Chapter One the author bell hooks' name is spelled with lowercase letters, in keeping with the author's chosen writing of her name.

11. During the reflective process of writing Chapter Three my own journals were referenced as primary sources. Due to their personal nature, these journals are unpublished and are included as primary sources in the List of References at the end of the dissertation. They are unpaginated and therefore not cited in-text. They were included in the final exhibition of works for examination.



## Table of Contents

<b>Declaration</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements and thanks</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Abstract and keywords</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Prefatory Note</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>List of Figures</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>List of Illustrations</b>	<b>xiii</b>
<b>Chapter One</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Aims and Objectives</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Practice-based Research and Exegesis</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Methodology and Methods</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Literature Survey</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Theoretical Framework</b>	<b>11</b>
Feminist Art	11
Art/Craft Debates	15
Materiality	19
<b>Themes and Concepts</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Chapter Two</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Textile Crafts in the Lives of Women</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Ceramic Histories</b>	<b>33</b>
<i>The Dinner Party</i>	<b>40</b>
<i>Womanhouse</i> and the Domestic Setting As Exhibition Space	<b>42</b>
<b>Louise Bourgeois</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Chapter Three</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>The Studio Process and Completed Works</b>	<b>49</b>
Compartments	49
Cocoons and Pods	60
Soft Sculpture	66
Embroidery	74
<b>Exhibiting the Work</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Appendix 1</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>List of References</b>	<b>97</b>

## List of Figures

<b>Figure 1.</b>	W. H. Coetzer and J. W. Prinsloo, <i>The Exodus</i> , 1952- 1960. Embroidered tapestry wool on canvas, 81,3 x 197 cm.	<b>31</b>
<b>Figure 2.</b>	W. H. Coetzer and H. Rossouw, <i>The Outspan at Thaba’Nchu</i> , 1952- 1960, Embroidered tapestry wool on canvas, 81,3 x 197 cm.	<b>31</b>
<b>Figure 3.</b>	Judy Chicago. <i>The Dinner Party</i> , 1974- 1979. Mixed media, 14,6 x 14,6 m.	<b>40</b>
<b>Figure 4.</b>	Judy Chicago. Installation view of Wing Three, featuring Virginia Woolf and Georgia O’Keeffe place settings from <i>The Dinner Party</i> , 1979.	<b>41</b>
<b>Figure 5.</b>	Janice Lester. <i>Personal Space</i> in <i>Womanhouse</i> , 1972. Found object and mixed-media installation, Dimensions variable.	<b>43</b>
<b>Figure 6.</b>	Faith Wilding. <i>Womb Room</i> , in <i>Womanhouse</i> , 1972. Crocheted and knotted yarn and rope, Dimensions variable.	<b>43</b>
<b>Figure 7.</b>	Louise Bourgeois. Cell 1, 1991. Mixed media, 210,8 x 243,8 x 274,3 cm. From: Bernadac, M. (1996) <i>Louise Bourgeois</i> , New York: Flammarion. Page 123.	<b>45</b>
<b>Figure 8.</b>	Louise Bourgeois. Red Room (Parents), 1994. Installation, wood, metal, fabric, mirror, 245 x 419 x 419 cm. From: Bernadac, M. (1996) <i>Louise Bourgeois</i> , New York: Flammarion. Page 150.	<b>46</b>
<b>Figure 9.</b>	Louise Bourgeois. <i>Ode À L’oubli</i> , 2002. Fabric book with found fabric collages, ink additions and lithograph, 28 x 31 x 4,5 cm. <a href="http://www.moma.org/collection_lb/browse_results.php?object_id=98440">http://www.moma.org/collection_lb/browse_results.php?object_id=98440</a>	<b>47</b>
<b>Figure 10.</b>	<i>Concept-Material-Process</i> in progress.	<b>50</b>
<b>Figure 11.</b>	<i>Concept-Material-Process</i> as presented at the Staff and Students Works in Progress exhibition at the Jack Heath Gallery in May 2015.	<b>50</b>
<b>Figure 12.</b>	Porcelain cocoons for <i>Domestic Science</i> in progress.	<b>50</b>
<b>Figure 13.</b>	Painting and engraving on jewellery box in progress.	<b>51</b>
<b>Figure 14.</b>	Jewellery box with muslin and felt liners inserted.	<b>51</b>
<b>Figure 15.</b>	Beadwork on handmade felt.	<b>52</b>
<b>Figure 16.</b>	Beadwork and embroidery on satin.	<b>52</b>
<b>Figure 17.</b>	Beadwork, embroidery, porcelain shard on velvet and satin ribbon.	<b>52</b>
<b>Figure 18.</b>	Beadwork and embroidery on bra.	<b>52</b>
<b>Figure 19.</b>	Beadwork on porcelain slip-cast doily.	<b>53</b>
<b>Figure 20.</b>	Porcelain shard and embroidery on handmade felt.	<b>53</b>
<b>Figure 21.</b>	Porcelain shard and embroidery on satin.	<b>53</b>

<b>Figure 22.</b>	Porcelain shard, beadwork and embroidery on handmade felt.	<b>53</b>
<b>Figure 23.</b>	Porcelain ‘pearl’ necklace, porcelain shard with moth meconium, beaded felt, moth wings and butterfly.	<b>54</b>
<b>Figure 24.</b>	Porcelain shards and handmade felt, in ring-holder.	<b>55</b>
<b>Figure 25.</b>	Tea trolley with porcelain boxes and objects from studio.	<b>56</b>
<b>Figure 26.</b>	Tea trolley with porcelain boxes, wooden drawers and natural found objects.	<b>57</b>
<b>Figure 27.</b>	Unit trays in entymology department of KZN Museum.	<b>57</b>
<b>Figure 28.</b>	Textile, ceramic and organic found objects in porcelain boxes.	<b>57</b>
<b>Figure 29.</b>	Porcelain slip-cast doily in box.	<b>58</b>
<b>Figure 30.</b>	Doily print in porcelain slip on side of box.	<b>58</b>
<b>Figure 31.</b>	Arrangement of doilies on tea trolley.	<b>59</b>
<b>Figure 32.</b>	Lower level of tea trolley with doily, slip-cast egg trays, insects and nests.	<b>59</b>
<b>Figure 33.</b>	Porcelain slab with stretched, folded and cracked texture.	<b>61</b>
<b>Figure 34.</b>	Porcelain with stretched and torn texture, with red iron oxide wash.	<b>61</b>
<b>Figure 35.</b>	Porcelain slip trailing creating cluster of droplets.	<b>61</b>
<b>Figure 36.</b>	Cocoon 1.	<b>61</b>
<b>Figure 37.</b>	Cocoon 2.	<b>61</b>
<b>Figure 38.</b>	Muslin bag of vermiculite on sculpture stand.	<b>62</b>
<b>Figure 39.</b>	Porcelain paperclay slabs joined on armature.	<b>62</b>
<b>Figure 40.</b>	Nylon stockings tied over cocoon to support damp slabs.	<b>63</b>
<b>Figure 41.</b>	Dry cocoon removed from sculpture stand and emptied of vermiculite.	<b>63</b>
<b>Figure 42.</b>	Bisque-fired cocoon.	<b>63</b>
<b>Figure 43.</b>	Porcelain paperclay cocoon fired to 1220° C	<b>63</b>
<b>Figure 44.</b>	Cocoon 3.	<b>64</b>
<b>Figure 45.</b>	Cocoon 4.	<b>64</b>
<b>Figure 46.</b>	Cocoon 5.	<b>64</b>
<b>Figure 47.</b>	Cocoon 6.	<b>65</b>
<b>Figure 48.</b>	Interior of Cocoon 6 with porcelain ‘egg’.	<b>65</b>
<b>Figure 49.</b>	Cocoon 7.	<b>65</b>
<b>Figure 50.</b>	<i>Pupa</i> in progress.	<b>66</b>
<b>Figure 51.</b>	Porcelain teeth with red iron oxide wash, unfired.	<b>67</b>

<b>Figure 52.</b>	Dermoid cyst with tooth and hair in human ovary. UCL Pathology Collections. <a href="https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/researchers-in-museums/2013/03/04/pulling-teeth-ovarian-teratomas-vagina-dentata/">https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/researchers-in-museums/2013/03/04/pulling-teeth-ovarian-teratomas-vagina-dentata/</a>	<b>67</b>
<b>Figure 53.</b>	<i>The Bride</i> in progress with porcelain teeth sewn in place.	<b>68</b>
<b>Figure 54.</b>	Fabric base form covered in lace with porcelain teeth ‘growing’ through.	<b>68</b>
<b>Figure 55.</b>	Detail of folds and pink chiffon insert.	<b>68</b>
<b>Figure 56.</b>	Experimenting with potential display stands for <i>The Bride</i> .	<b>69</b>
<b>Figure 57.</b>	Slumped glass flasks.	<b>69</b>
<b>Figure 58.</b>	Final glass stand composed of slumped flask and glass stopper.	<b>69</b>
<b>Figure 59.</b>	Completed sample of red blood cells showing variation in texture and tone.	<b>70</b>
<b>Figure 60.</b>	Start of thread blood clots holding cells together.	<b>70</b>
<b>Figure 61.</b>	Porcelain leukocytes in progress.	<b>71</b>
<b>Figure 62.</b>	Detail of doily texture on porcelain slab.	<b>71</b>
<b>Figure 63.</b>	Hospital bed in studio.	<b>71</b>
<b>Figure 64.</b>	Review arrangement of clotted red blood cells on hospital bed with sheet.	<b>72</b>
<b>Figure 65.</b>	Sinewy strands within felt.	<b>72</b>
<b>Figure 66.</b>	Progressive growth of quilt.	<b>72</b>
<b>Figure 67.</b>	Complete textile and porcelain hexagon quilt on hospital bed.	<b>73</b>
<b>Figure 68.</b>	Porcelain hexagons tied onto quilt.	<b>73</b>
<b>Figure 69.</b>	Reviewing of red blood cells arranged over quilt.	<b>74</b>
<b>Figure 70.</b>	Stain imagery in acrylic paint and embroidery.	<b>75</b>
<b>Figure 71.</b>	Embroidery on cotton.	<b>76</b>
<b>Figure 72.</b>	Embroidery on cotton.	<b>76</b>
<b>Figure 73.</b>	Textural stain embroidery on calico.	<b>76</b>
<b>Figure 74.</b>	Watercolours, mercurochrome and embroidery ‘stains’ with porcelain on Aida.	<b>77</b>
<b>Figure 75.</b>	Womb/stain embroidery on handmade felt.	<b>77</b>
<b>Figure 76.</b>	Stain embroidery on printed handkerchief.	<b>77</b>
<b>Figure 77.</b>	Red stain embroidery on vintage handkerchief.	<b>78</b>
<b>Figure 78.</b>	Moth embroidery on handkerchief.	<b>78</b>
<b>Figure 79.</b>	Beginning of cover embroidery.	<b>78</b>
<b>Figure 80.</b>	Progress of cover embroidery.	<b>78</b>

<b>Figure 81.</b>	Complete cover embroidery.	<b>79</b>
<b>Figure 82.</b>	First rehearsal of exhibition display.	<b>80</b>
<b>Figure 83.</b>	Second rehearsal of exhibition display.	<b>81</b>
<b>Figure 84.</b>	Panorama of final exhibition display in progress.	<b>81</b>
<b>Figure 85.</b>	Entry into <i>Innerspace</i> , with <i>Domestic Science</i> , <i>The Bride</i> and <i>The Bride's Protector</i> at front of room.	<b>81</b>
<b>Figure 86.</b>	<i>Incubation</i> in corner 'study' with screen of garments.	<b>82</b>
<b>Figure 87.</b>	<i>Concept-Material-Process</i> on coffee table, <i>Pupa</i> on table and <i>Consume</i> .	<b>82</b>
<b>Figure 88.</b>	<i>Tear and Repair</i> in 'concealed' area.	<b>83</b>
<b>Figure 89.</b>	Blood cells on fishing line grid.	<b>83</b>
<b>Figure 90.</b>	<i>Rebirth</i> on nightstand.	<b>83</b>

## List of Illustrations

<b>Illustration 1.</b>	Jessica Steytler, <i>The Bride</i> , 2015.	<b>88</b>
<b>Illustration 2.</b>	Jessica Steytler, <i>The Bride's Protector</i> , 2015-2016.	<b>89</b>
<b>Illustration 3.</b>	Jessica Steytler, <i>Domestic Science</i> , 2016.	<b>90</b>
<b>Illustration 4.</b>	Jessica Steytler, <i>Concept-Material-Process</i> , 2015.	<b>91</b>
<b>Illustration 5.</b>	Jessica Steytler, <i>Incubation</i> , 2014-2016.	<b>92</b>
<b>Illustration 6.</b>	Jessica Steytler, <i>Consume</i> , 2015-2016.	<b>93</b>
<b>Illustration 7.</b>	Jessica Steytler, <i>Tear and Repair</i> , 2015-2016.	<b>94</b>
<b>Illustration 8.</b>	Jessica Steytler, <i>Rebirth</i> , 2014-2016.	<b>95</b>
<b>Illustration 9.</b>	Jessica Steytler, <i>Pupa</i> , 2015.	<b>96</b>

## Chapter One

### Introduction

The relationships between the key media of needlework, textiles and porcelain and the concepts of metamorphosis, catharsis and healing will be explored in this exegetical research. The creative practice of Jessica Steytler is central to this research, and the study will question how the materiality and processes of my media contribute meaning to the concepts of my practice.

This dissertation is the written component of the practice-based MAFA, which focuses on the making of mixed-media works, and will be presented as an exegesis. Practice-based research is an '*original investigation*' where the creative outcomes of the practice are integral to a full understanding of the research (Candy 2006). It is a methodology that retains traditional approaches to research but makes way for the inclusion of the creative process as an integral component of the research (Gray and Malins 2004:3). The creative artefacts that are part of the research outcomes will be submitted alongside the written research findings, as an exhibition of a series of works collectively titled *Innerspace*. The exhibition and exegesis should be considered together as a whole.

Chapter One will set out the aims and research questions of the study. Basic theories of practice-based research and the exegesis will be clarified; from here the methodology and methods of the research will be delineated. A literature review will provide context for the research. The theoretical framework incorporating discourses on feminist art history and art/craft debates will situate the focus of the enquiry. The concepts of my practice will also be illustrated in this chapter.

Context and background for my key media and practice as a whole will be presented in Chapter Two. The materiality of needlework, textiles and porcelain will be explicated through the analysis of historical developments and connotations of the media, taking into account the intersections of feminist art history and art/craft debates. This will be conducted by studying and synthesising past literature and research, after which the practice will be contextualised by drawing comparisons and contrasts with artist Louise

Bourgeois and feminist artworks *The Dinner Party*, by Judy Chicago, and *Womanhouse*, a group exhibition co-ordinated by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro.

Chapter Three will deal with the discussion of the studio processes and final works.

Documentation such as my journal entries and photographs of works in progress will be drawn on to provide realisations that occurred in the present time of making and reflecting on the works. A reflective, discursive style will be employed in this discussion of works in progress and complete. The theoretical frameworks of Chapter One and material histories and practical contexts of Chapter Two will be cross-referenced in this chapter to demonstrate how the practical and theoretical components unfold together and inform one another. This chapter will conclude with a discussion on the final exhibition of the creative artefacts.

## **Aims and Objectives**

This research is an exegetical study with the studio-based creative practice as the main focus. The primary aim of the project is to establish how the concepts, media and processes of the practice intersect and how the materiality of the media adds significance and meaning to the creative practice as a whole. This interrogation includes the conceptual framework behind the practice as well as the display and potential reception of the final exhibited artworks. The media concerned in this practice are porcelain, textiles and embroidery and are the focus of the research. The findings of this research will be presented as an exhibition of artworks and a written dissertation in the form of an exegesis. The following objectives have been identified as key stages in the research process that will lay a path towards meeting the research aim.

Firstly, methodologies of practice-based research will be established in order to formulate appropriate methods required to undertake the studio-based inquiry of this project. Gray and Malins (2004), Sullivan (2010), and Hamilton and Jaaniste (2009) provide significant tools for the practice-based researcher to frame research within an academic context. Setting practice-based methodologies in place will allow for the studio-based research process to take place efficiently and with significant effect to the project; additionally, this



will assist in the communicating of the practical research findings alongside the written, theoretical findings in a single, integrated exegetical text.

Secondly the research needs to be situated within a greater art-historical context. Feminist art, art/craft debates and materiality theory will form the framework within which this research project is located. The exploration of materiality will include connotations attached to and attitudes towards the media, both past and present, as well as the physical materiality of the media. The creative practice will be compared and contrasted with the work of the artist Louise Bourgeois as well as with feminist artworks *The Dinner Party* and *Womanhouse* as part of the contextualizing process. The background to my personal context as a practitioner will also play a role in this research.

The studio-based research will involve the production and exhibition of artworks that utilize my core media. The processes, stages, and outcomes of the creative production will be photographed and discussed in a daily journal. From these photographs and writings, key elements of the practice will be extracted and further analysed. This combination of photographed and written analysis will be presented in the final chapter. The analysis needs to make critical reference to the theoretical framework of this project. A flexible and open approach to methods of writing will allow for a fluid discussion that encapsulates significant details of the creative practice. The exhibition will be the culmination of the studio-based research while the exegesis will supplement the practice by documenting the critical thought processes.

The approach to this research is one that takes into account the materiality of the media and what it offers to the practice. It considers how the key media and their processes are inextricably woven into the concepts behind the practice. Throughout the creative process it will be considered how the concepts, media and processes reflect closely on one another. Kim Bagley took this approach in her Masters exegesis *Clay-Earth-Skin: An Exegesis of Material and Process in Kim Bagley's Ceramics* (2010), and I intend to expand on it in my own research. The histories and connotations of embroidery, textiles and porcelain will be investigated in order to understand the potential meanings that each medium contributes to the creative practice.

## **Research Questions**

Key questions have been identified as points that will assist in exploring and reflecting on both the theoretical and studio-based research. The questions have been categorized in two flexible, overlapping phases of inquiry. The first phase of questions, entitled ‘Situating Practice’, is concerned with the contextualization of the creative practice within a broader setting of art history and practice, and will assist in developing an appropriate framework. The second phase of questions, ‘Reflecting on Practice’, focuses on the analysis of and reflection on the studio-based creations and are tailored specifically to the creative practice. These questions support the process of studio-based inquiry feeding back into the theoretical research and bolstering the text-based research findings.

### **Situating Practice**

- How do theories of materiality relate to my creative practice? (Sofaer 2007, du Preez 2008, Bal 2001)
- What meanings and histories are connected with my media, porcelain, textiles, and embroidery? (Barber 1994, Schoeser 2003, Lucie-Smith 1981, Turney 2004)
- How is my art similar to (or different from) that of other artists, in particular Louise Bourgeois (with regard to media, processes and conceptual aims)?
- How do art/craft debates and feminist discourses influence me and manifest in my work?
- How do my personal contexts as a practitioner impact on the concepts I focus on and the media and processes I use?

### **Reflecting on Practice**

- What are the main concepts of my creative practice?
- Why am I using and combining these media, including needlework and porcelain? (Jones 1996, Borzello 2000)
- How do I interpret ideas of metamorphosis, catharsis and healing, and how are themes of biology reflected in my work? (Ovid 1986, Gilbert and Schneiderman 1961, Powell 2007, Jouanna 1999)

- In what ways do my textile and porcelain processes connect with concepts of metamorphosis, catharsis or healing, as well as issues of gender?
- How does the symbolic and physical materiality of my media create layers of meaning in my work? (Sofaer 2007, du Preez 2008, Bal 2001)
- What symbolic significance is there in my creative practice? (Bagley 2010)
- What are the appropriate forms of display for my art? (Turney 2004, Schoeser 2003)
- How can I produce an integrated exhibition of my practical work and the exegesis?

## **Practice-based Research and Exegesis**

Practice-based research is a methodology defined by Linda Candy (2006) as an '*original investigation*' where the creative outcomes, or '*artefacts*', of the practice are integral to a full understanding of the research. The creative artefacts that are part of the research outcomes are submitted alongside an exegesis. By contrast, *practice-led* research is focused on developing knowledge in a particular area of the practice and the inclusion of creative outcomes with the findings is not necessarily required (Candy 2006:3). While these terms and definitions are often understood differently and used interchangeably in visual arts research Candy (2006:3) specifies that in the visual arts *practice-based* research is the methodology used and the focus is on the creative process and artefacts. On this basis I will use the term practice-based research when referring to the methodologies of this research project.

Practice-based research retains traditional approaches to research but makes way for the inclusion of the creative process as an integral component of the research (Gray and Malins 2004:3). The reflective process of practice-based research acknowledges the significance of the embedded knowledge of the practitioner (Gray and Malins 2004:22) and posits the work produced by artists as valid forms of research (Sullivan 2010). However, it is still necessary for this research to be relevant, intentional and disciplined, revealing, and public (Gray and Malins 2004:16). McNamara (n.d:7) highlights the possibility of practice-based researchers falling into a trap of thinking that creative practice

becomes valid research simply because it is conducted under the umbrella of practice-based research.

In order for practice-based research to be relevant and revealing the practice needs to be situated and contextualized. Both the conceptual and practical components of the research need to be located within a broader framework of surrounding theory and practice (Sullivan 2010, Gray and Malins 2004, Hamilton and Jaaniste 2009). Practice-based researchers need to extend beyond their own practice and engage with past and present practice, to move from a personal discussion to one of '*critical reflection*' (McNamara n.d:5). The aim of research is to establish new insights; this cannot happen if the practice is analyzed within a vacuum (McNamara n.d:6). Thus appropriate methodologies and frameworks need to be established for practice-based research projects.

Therefore the dissertation component will be presented as an exegesis. An exegesis is a form of translation typically used in theological studies that has been adapted for use in creative arts research (Bagley 2010:14). The exegesis allows the arts researcher to present and discuss the studio processes in relation to the relevant theories and practices that contextualize the research (Barrett 2007:195).

## **Methodology and Methods**

An approach should be developed where the practice is both the initiator and the context of the research, as well as a role player in the methodology (Gray and Malins 2004:16). I will use an 'action and reflection' (Gray and Malins 2004) approach to the research process. Research methodologies can include both visual and textual methods, and a combination of different approaches can be developed for practice-based research projects (Sullivan 2010:55).

The 'action' phase of the research focuses on data gathering and includes the creation, construction and recording of artworks as well as the scoping for relevant text sources. Qualitative methods of reviewing and surveying will be used to assess what secondary sources are relevant to the study. Secondary sources consulted include books, electronic journal articles, websites and video interviews.

Use of written language alone to express ideas can be limiting (Gray and Malins 2004:95) and therefore a variety of methods will be employed to gather and collate information generated by the creative practice. The creation of artworks is included as a research method in this project as it is the primary driver for generating information for the research. Experiments with various media include clay and glaze tests, 2D and 3D textile experiments, and the assessment of fabric stains and dyes. In addition my sketchbooks are a record of the development of my ideas and concepts over time and facilitate visual thinking (Gray and Malins 2004:111).

Digital photography allows me to capture precise moments in the creative process and enables reflection on and analysis of the practice. I will photograph the development of the creation of individual artworks from start to completion to record the media and how they are used in production. These photographs will be organized with text annotations (Gray and Malins 2004:109) and be accompanied by written notes that analyse relevant aspects of the creative process and practice as a whole.

The 'reflection' stage focuses on data analysis and is the reflective and reflexive analysis of my methods, materials, tools and concepts. It includes more critical response to the creative practice and text-based findings.

A reflective journal will consider my concepts, materials and processes in relation to my aims of finding the connections between them. These writings will be a deeper analysis of the creative practice and demonstrate a reflexive, critical awareness of the practice. This will form the basis of the writing in the chapter 'Reflecting on Practice' and take into consideration the wider context of the practice that is gleaned from secondary text-based sources.

Mieke Bal's approach to art-writing in Louise Bourgeois' *Spider: The Architecture of Art-Writing* (2001) will inform the method used in analysing and discussing the artworks of my practice. Bal's method is fluid and flexible and allows for an analysis that is not rigid but considers the many facets an artwork might have. Additionally this approach places great emphasis on the materiality of artworks, which is most pertinent to this research. Qualitative methods will again be used in responding to secondary text-based sources.

Texts will be reflected on and relevant information will be extracted and composed into a cohesive body that feeds into the analysis and discussion of the creative practice.

## **Literature Survey**

Pertinent key references that have been consulted in the research process of this project are outlined below in a literature survey. These include books, electronic journal articles, and videos of interviews.

Carole Gray and Julian Malins' *Visualizing Research: A Guide to the Research Process in Art and Design* (2004) is a practical guide to conducting practice-based research within art contexts. Through making comparisons and contrasts with traditional research processes, they introduce methods for practitioners to develop research projects, situate and contextualize research, establish methodologies and methods, and communicate findings. Graeme Sullivan's *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in Visual Arts* (2010) focuses on the theories behind practice-based research. Sullivan establishes frameworks and methodologies that are relevant to practice-based research and situate it as research. Jillian Hamilton and Luke Jaaniste's report *Content, Structure and Orientations of the Practice-led Exegesis* (2009) looks at different practice-based theses that follow the form of an exegesis and compares and contrasts the topics and information included, and the structure of the exegeses. Hamilton and Jaaniste develop a structural framework of chapters and sections, delineating where information and content fits into the chapters. This framework offers significant guidance to researchers undertaking exegetical studies.

Mieke Bal's *Louise Bourgeois' Spider: The Architecture of Art-Writing* (2001) is dedicated to an analysis and discussion of Louise Bourgeois' 1997 installation *Spider*. Simultaneously with an analysis of *Spider*, Bal addresses issues she sees in methods used to write about artworks. Bal proposes that in art-writing the artwork should come first and should decide the methodology and framework used. She demonstrates this approach in her analysis of *Spider*. This attitude to art-writing provides substantial and pertinent tools required in developing the methodology and approach to my practice-based research. Marie-Laure Bernadac's *Louise Bourgeois* (1996) looks at the wide production of Louise Bourgeois' creative practice, with reflection on the concepts of the practice as well as

Bourgeois' life. An analysis of the symbolism of Bourgeois' many installations, including many of the early *Cells*, is beneficial to this research.

Texts adding to my understanding of materiality are Amanda du Preez's article *(Im)Materiality: On the Matter of Art* (2008) and Joanna Sofaer's *Material Matters* (2007). Du Preez (2008) analyses the significance of the material art is made of, and how art objects take up physical space and exist in the world. The dematerialization of art, from conceptual art to performance and body art, is covered to establish the flux of the value of material in the art world. Several theorists are interrogated in her exploration of materiality, including Bal. Throughout her argument du Preez emphasizes how the materials of an artwork also embody the concept of the work, and her conclusion is that concept and material should not be separated. Sofaer (2007) considers the different understandings and definitions of materiality. In *Material Matters* art historians, architectural historians and archaeologists apply materiality theory to discuss how objects are used to construct and convey social identities. These writers examine a wide range of material objects from the past and present. The text provides a wide-encompassing critique on the role of material culture in the construction and conveying of personality and identity, and takes into account intersections of race, age, gender, sexuality, and class.

Jessica Webster's Masters thesis *Trauma as a Borderland Concept in Contemporary South African Painting* (2010) interrogates the material capabilities of paint and the painted surface to embody concepts of trauma. In her Masters thesis *Clay-Earth-Skin: An Exegesis of Material and Process in Kim Bagley's Ceramics* (2010) Kim Bagley uses materiality theory to explore how clay can express her idea of skin and earth as connected elements.

Contributing to the feminist approach in my research are Laurie Adams' *The Methodologies of Art: An Introduction* (1996), Francis Borzello's *A World of Our Own: Women as Artists* (2000), Marion Arnold's *Women and Art in South Africa* (1996) and Amelia Jones' *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History* (1996). Adams (1996) summarizes the use of feminism in art analysis as well as issues in the art world that are tackled by the feminist approach. Borzello (2000) looks at the lives and professions of women artists in the Western world from the 1500s to the present day and the attitudes towards them, including the feminist art movement and its contribution to the art world. Arnold (1996) examines the work of South African women artists and

addresses notions of feminism within the context of South Africa and its art world. Jones (1996) investigates Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* in relation to the feminist art movement's history. Of particular interest is a discussion of the use of domestic themes and materials as a tactic of feminist art.

Offering significant insight into textile craft and needlecraft are Jo Turney's article *Here's One I Made Earlier: Making and Living with Home Craft in Contemporary Britain* (2004), Elizabeth Barber's *Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years: Women, Cloth and Society in Early Times* (1994), Mary Schoeser's *World Textiles: A Concise History* (2003) and Rozsika Parker's *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (2010). Turney (2004) observes how amateur makers of home needlecraft navigate ideas and tensions of art, craft and design in the making and displaying of needlecraft objects. Barber (1994) tracks the development of textile technologies from the Stone Age to the late Iron Age with focus on spinning, weaving and dyeing and investigates how and why textile production became allocated as 'women's work'. Schoeser (2003) includes information on textiles as a vehicle for political messages, women using textiles as a source of economic empowerment and textile artists pushing the boundaries between art and craft. Parker (2010) unravels how embroidery became associated with women and femininity and considers this in a 21<sup>st</sup> century context.

Various interviews with Grayson Perry (Perry 2009, Perry 2012, Perry 2013), Edward Lucie-Smith's *The Story of Craft: The Craftsman's Role in Society* (1981) and Elbé Coetsee's *Craft Art in South Africa* (2002) contribute to my exploration of craft and the art/craft debate. Perry (2009, 2012, 2013) discusses issues pertaining to the art/craft debate and illustrates how the boundaries around art have blurred. Lucie-Smith (1981) investigates the development of and attitudes towards craft from the Stone Age to the time of publication. Coetsee (2002) provides a South African context to this topic and examines a wide range of craft produced in South Africa.



## **Theoretical Framework**

Theories of practice-based research and exegesis will form the foundation of my theoretical framework. The framework needs to consider the relationship between the practice and surrounding theories and to accommodate a potentially wide inclusion of themes (Sullivan 2010:99). For these reasons the framework must be flexible and allow for flow between themes, theories and practice; it can therefore derive from a combination of already established frameworks and methods as well as emerging ones (Sullivan 2010). Additionally it should recognize the significance of my skills and practice as a means of research (Gray and Malins 2004:22).

Bal's (2001) method of art-writing proposes the idea of artworks as '*theoretical objects*' that embody their theory through their materiality. The artwork should be allowed to decide the framework and methodology used in the writing. Themes that have arisen during the creative process that inform the theoretical framework are feminist art discourse, art/craft debates and materiality. The concepts behind the practice that form the conceptual framework are metamorphosis, catharsis, healing and scientific themes.

### **Feminist Art**

bell hooks defines feminism as '*a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression*' (hooks 2000:viii). The feminist art movement emerged in the Western art world in the late 1960s and developed through the 1970s and 1980s, growing from the second wave of feminism that took place in the United States of America and Britain (DiTolla 2016). Although feminism as a movement had already been present in society throughout several decades, it was in the 1970s that it was first used as a framework within the art world (Borzello 2000:195).

By adopting a feminist approach I will use gender as a lens through which to analyse and understand my creative practice (Adams 1996:79). Significant aspects of feminist art that are most pertinent to my own creative practice include the expression of issues experienced by women, the use of vaginal imagery in iconography, and the intentional use of 'craft' and 'domestic' materials in art-making to address art/craft hierarchies. These characteristics seen in feminist art form the framework within which I will locate and

critically discuss my practice. Judy Chicago's 1979 installation *The Dinner Party* offers a framework for analysing within a feminist context the significance and histories behind the needlework and porcelain of my creative practice (Jones 1996, Borzello 2000).

The basic theories of feminist art are born out of those of the socio-political movements and are based on an understanding of a patriarchal Western art world where art history, art institutions and value systems function within this exclusive, Eurocentric patriarchal system (Borzello 2000; The Guerrilla Girls 1998). The aim of feminist art of the 1970s, and later the 1980s, was to challenge discrimination within the art world. Through theory and art writing feminist art historians and critics questioned the established histories of Western art and how women were excluded from the art world (Adams 1996:79); the roles of women in art were re-evaluated on a large scale and much research into the history of women artists was conducted, resulting in their contributions being included in art history writings (Borzello 2000:207; The Guerrilla Girls 1998:9). New frameworks for art analysis and criticism were established, allowing for more inclusive readings of past and contemporary art (DiTolla 2016). Linda Nochlin, Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker are key art historians who contributed to this feminist revision of art history.

In feminist art practice focus was placed on creating alternative art spaces that were open to women artists and minority artists (DiTolla 2016) and on challenging existing galleries and policies to become more inclusive (Borzello 2000:205). The movement worked towards greater visibility of artists excluded from the established art world. (The Guerrilla Girls 1998:8).

The underlying idea of '*the personal is the political*' (Borzello 2000:200) came to the fore. Feminist artists began making work that shared women's perspectives and expressed issues that are part of predominantly female experiences (DiTolla 2016; Borzello 2000:204). Themes such as race, class (Borzello 2000:200), menstruation, pregnancy (Jones 1996:27) and domesticity (Jones 1996:29) defined feminist art and were portrayed by women of many different backgrounds and intersections (Borzello 2000:200). No one particular style of medium epitomized the movement and feminist artists used elements and techniques from performance art (Borzello 2000:200), body art, video art (DiTolla 2016) as well as 'craft' materials (Jones 1996). The nude female form featured significantly in all aspects of feminist art and played into a process of reclaiming control of

the female nude (Borzello 2000:201) that had otherwise been portrayed as an object of the male gaze in past centuries of Western art (The Guerrilla Girls 1998).

A significant element of feminist art, particularly in the 1970s, was the use of vaginal imagery. This aesthetic of vaginal imagery runs parallel with the expressions of themes of female experiences- menstruation, pregnancy, birth, lactation, and sexual violence- and therefore becomes both an aesthetic as well as conceptual tool. Depictions of the vulva, vagina and the uterus were done in many different ways, and also included portrayals of menstruation, menstrual blood and the use of menstrual blood as a medium (Jones 1996:27). Responses to this '*central-core imagery*', a term used by Judy Chicago to refer collectively to vaginal, uterine and menstrual imagery (Jones 1996:26), is mixed. Amelia Jones (1996:22) writes that such representations of the female body were used as tools to reclaim female sexuality and self-identity. Representing female sexuality, biology and aspects of female experience in these ways becomes a strong and intentional response to the depiction of 'femaleness' in patriarchal culture as shameful and dirty, often excluded or sterilized in art depictions by men (Ecker 1985:17). Judy Chicago (1996:25) writes that her intention when using central-core imagery in her creative practice was to create a visual framework that includes female experiences and speaks to '*women's ways of being and doing*'.

While many artists and writers were and are in support of central-core imagery, likewise critics have tackled the use of it in feminist art, defining it as essentialist (Jones 1996:25). This critique of essentialism in feminist art confronts how the use of central-core imagery reduces the multiple experiences of women down to a set of biological features and processes and depicts the experiences of all women as being the same (Jones 1996:26). *The Dinner Party* has been critiqued for perpetuating these ideas. The vulvar, vaginal forms of the china plates of *The Dinner Party* have been described as reinforcing this essentialist depiction of women, and furthermore are seen as being problematic by representing a group of thirty-nine unique women with very similar vulvar forms, thereby erasing their individual experiences (Jones 1996:26). In defense of her central-core imagery, Chicago (1996:26) states in her autobiography that she is not essentialist but does believe that biology, alongside social and cultural conditioning, does influence how different the female experience is. Jones (1996:25) believes that within genital imagery there is the potential for an ambiguous reading that does not reduce the imagery to a

simple depiction of female genitalia but takes into account the complexities and layers of female sexuality.

In the making of work many feminist artists used domestic 'craft' materials and processes (Jones 1996:29). Soft sculpture, embroidery, knitting, sewing and other textile crafts (Borzello 2000:200) were utilized to discuss themes of domesticity and how women experienced the interior domestic realm of the home (Jones 1996:29). These crafts in particular are often associated with femininity, considered domestic and performed by amateur women crafters from within the home. Feminist artists appropriated these materials (and with them the surrounding associations) and applied them in a fine art context (Borzello 2000:200), exhibiting them in gallery spaces used to seeing accepted forms of 'fine art' such as painting and sculpture. The use of these materials not only added embedded meaning to artworks exploring themes of gender but it also confronted the exclusive nature of the art world and challenged the accepted categorizations of 'fine art' and 'craft' (Jones 1996:29; Adams 1996:81). The feminist contribution to the art/craft debate was significant in its approach to craft categorization; it posited that the hierarchy of media was gendered and that 'crafts' were excluded from 'fine art' genres on the basis that they were associated with women (Ecker 1985:16; Adams 1996:82).

In South African art the engagement with feminism and gender very often intersects with issues of race. Marion Arnold (1996:146) writes that South African political activism in the 1980s was dominated by anti-apartheid movements which tended to overshadow concerns of gender. This resulted in the development of art practices by South African women artists that do not reflect one singular style of 'South African feminist art' but rather a body of art by women artists that is diverse in its reflections on the many varying intersections of personal experiences and responses with artistic style and choices (Arnold 1996:147). It is important to be aware of our particular South African context in relation to my creative practice.

Feminist art has been a considerable influence on my own creative practice. While the concepts behind my work can be interpreted in a variety of ways the core narratives behind them refer significantly to issues very often experienced by women. I use my practice to engage with these issues and through this process the personal does become the political. The concept of central-core imagery and the critiques surrounding it contributes

significantly to the discussion and understanding of my creative practice. Present in my work are symbolic references to the uterus and menstruation, which in turn reference elements of feminist art. The use of ‘craft’ materials, namely textiles, embroidery and ceramic, is the basis of my creative practice. The variety of approaches taken by artists of the feminist art movement in using these media and their embedded meanings to discuss female experiences of domesticity, sexuality and gender-based violence, and challenge the categorizations of art and craft most certainly plays into the concepts of my practice and contributes to the discussion of my media and surrounding materiality.

### **Art/Craft Debates**

Art/craft debates have been present since the Renaissance (Lucie-Smith 1981:11) and are still very relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They tackle issues of the definitions of ‘art’ and ‘craft’, the hierarchical boundaries between the two and perceived superiority of ‘art’ over ‘craft’ (Metcalf 1997). The ideas of art/craft debates are pertinent to and assist in contextualizing my research as my practice employs craft materials and techniques, while also contributing to the conceptual exploration of binary oppositions.

Art/craft hierarchies are based on Western ideas of value (Arnold 1996:15) that place ‘art’ in a superior position to ‘craft’. The criteria of this separation are influenced by economic and social factors of society, such as class and gender (Parker 2010:5), which similarly have connotations of lesser or greater value attached to them. Over the centuries ‘art’ came to be defined as something to be contemplated and superior to ‘craft’, while ‘craft’ was considered purely functional and lower in the hierarchy (Coetsee 2002:8).

The earliest manifestations of an art/craft hierarchy occurred during the 12th century. Painting and sculpture that focused on the depiction of the human figure gained a heightened sense of value, while other processes like enameling and metalwork lost status (Heslop 1997:54). By the Renaissance the concept of ‘art’ was painting, sculpture and architecture, as well as rhetoric, music and poetry (Greenhalgh 1997:26). During this time embroidery was becoming associated with femininity and many women created embroidered articles at home, for the home. This fed into art/craft hierarchies, creating a separation that was based not only on materials but also gender (Parker 2010:5). The

prevalent attitude towards craft during the Renaissance was that it was merely a set of skills passed between generations, whereas art skills can also be taught, but true art came from the talent of a '*genius*' (Lucie-Smith 1981:157). There was a distinction between the artist and the craftsman, who was considered to be simply the maker who received orders of design (Lucie-Smith 1981:167). During the Enlightenment of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the establishment of Academies further separated 'art' and 'craft' (Greenhalgh 1997:27). 'Art' was taught and produced formally in the Academies by a male elite for public consumption. 'Craft' was taught and produced informally in homes by women and the working-class as a hobby, for necessity or to sell for small incomes. This introduced a new separation of 'art' and 'craft' based on the location of where work was made and by whom (Parker 2010:5).

The Industrial Revolution of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries saw the division and hierarchies of 'art' and 'craft' being further cemented and the separation of craft objects by the processes used. Many crafts assembled within the genre became referred to as 'craft' and 'decorative art' simply due to their exclusion from the intellectual category of 'art' (Greenhalgh 1997:28). Furthermore, 'art' was identified as non-functional and 'craft' as functional (Greenhalgh 1997:29). The establishment of factories and mechanisation of many craft processes created a new division within the art/craft hierarchy. 'Craft' became associated with items that were made by hand outside of factories, and items made in factories became identified specifically as industrial, machine-made products (Lucie-Smith 1981:11). It was this industrialization that provoked John Ruskin to respond by initiating the Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain (Lucie-Smith 1981:199).

The Arts and Crafts Movement of the late-19<sup>th</sup> Century was led by two key players: John Ruskin and William Morris. Ruskin was influenced by A.W.N. Pugin, whose design rules of simplicity and integrity of design fed into the philosophies of the Arts and Crafts Movement (Lucie-Smith 1981:207). Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice* shared his ideologies of craft and design and became considered an early manifesto for the Movement (Lucie-Smith 1981:208); his philosophy encouraged a return to handwork without unnecessary intervention of machinery, truth to materials, and the production of unique pieces rather than the replication of uniform products (Lucie-Smith 1981:209). Ruskin's writing in turn influenced Morris, who put these philosophies into practice with his design and production (V & A Museum 2016). The Arts and Crafts Movement idealized pre-Industrial

Revolution craft practices (Lucie-Smith 1981:212), attempted to reunite 'art' and 'craft' (Cooper 1994:18), and forged a craft philosophy that emphasized pride and quality of craftsmanship and skill (Jirousek 1995). These philosophies spread across Europe and to America, and still influence craft and design philosophies of the 21st Century (Greenhalgh 1997:25).

Established over centuries these art/craft hierarchies are still present and influential today in the 21st Century. The criteria used to separate and define 'art' and 'craft' are influenced by ideas of value and stereotyped binaries that permeate and divide society. 'Art' and 'craft' have been divided by perceptions of conceptual content, type of production, media, location of production and display, intention of production, gender, class, and ethnicity. The table on Page 18 serves to broadly illustrate the division between 'art' and 'craft', although is by no means exhaustive; it is crucial to note that each criterion has its own nuances and issues that are not detailed here.

Although these divisions have been entrenched over a significant time they are not impermeable, and the intersections of these criteria affect the categorization of objects, placing them in both the 'art' and 'craft' category. The subversion of opposing values in work that lies between 'art' and 'craft' creates an unsettling tension (Perry 2009) that disturbs these manmade categories of organization (Heslop 1997:55). Embroidery is a production that subverts these oppositions. While it makes use of textile-based media and is produced within domestic settings, usually by hobbyists, to decorate the home, it is very frequently seen displayed in frames using display tactics of 'fine art' galleries and museums (Turney 2004:270). Embroidery kits that present Modern art as needlework patterns are significant as they appropriate content and subject matter deemed suitable for 'art' for a domestic, 'craft' pursuit and directly challenge definitions of 'art' and 'craft' (Turney 2004:267).

Criterion	'Art'	'Craft'
Production	Painting; sculpture (Arnold 1996:106; Parker 2010:5; Heslop 1997:54)	Ceramic productions; textile productions; jewelry-making; glasswork (Coetsee 2010)
Media	Paint on canvas; marble; metals; stone (Arnold 1996:106)	Clay; textiles; fibres; glass; beads; wax; wood (Parker 2010; Dormer 1997:7; Coetsee 2010)
Location of production and display	'Art' academies and schools; studios; 'art' galleries (Greenhalgh 2002:12; Parker 2010:5)	Home; home workshops (Turney 2004)
Intention of production	Display; conceptual expression; sale (at higher prices) (Parker 2010:5; Cooper 1994)	Decoration of home; functional use in home (Coetsee 2002; Turney 2004); sale (at lower prices)
Gender	Male (Arnold 1996:106)	Female (Parker 2010; Turney 2004:269)
Class	Upper-classes; privilege (Parker 2010:120; Turney 2004:269)	Working-classes (Cooper 1994; Turney 2004:269)
Ethnicity	White (Arnold 1996:106)	People of colour (Arnold 1996:106)

Table I: Broad illustration of stereotypical binaries within art/craft hierarchy.

The division of 'art' and 'craft' simultaneously relied on and created definitions of the two concepts, contributing to our current understandings of 'art' and 'craft' and influencing the ways in which we perceive value embedded in them. The term 'craft' can be used to refer to specific learnt skills and philosophies used in the creation of objects (Greenhalgh 1997:22; Lucie-Smith 1981:11). These 'craft' skills can be taught to others (Perry 2009); they emphasise the philosophy of making objects that are both aesthetically pleasing and technically sound (Perry 2009). In an anthropological sense, 'craft' can refer to work made by a group of people of the same culture, religion, beliefs, day-to-day lives, and is seen as connected to the culture of the people who made and make it (Lynn-Williams 2006:13; Alkema 2009:1). 'Craft' can also define objects that are made with particular media and techniques such as glass, clay, textiles and basketry (Dormer 1997:7; Coetsee: 2002, 2015).



Within art/craft hierarchies the concept of binary oppositions plays a significant role. Claude Lévi-Strauss developed this concept as a methodology in structural anthropology. Lévi-Strauss proposed that binary oppositions are instrumental in the formation and maintenance of culture; they operate within cultures to create rules and systems of organisation by placing two ideas or values in direct opposition to one another (Briggs and Meyer 2009). Often connotations of positive and negative are attached to these pairings. Within the particular framework of the art/craft debate, 'art' and 'craft' are set in opposition to one another, as are the divided ideas of production, media, location and function. The separation of gender, class and ethnicity within the art/craft hierarchy are influenced by factors already present in society (Parker 2010:5).

### **Materiality**

Materiality theory is concerned with unpacking and exploring issues that surround the matter and physical presence of objects. The two main approaches to materiality are used in art history and visual art, and material culture theory. Materiality is described by Joanna Sofaer (2007:2) as being the potential of art media to '*provoke aesthetic responses*' in viewers. Amanda du Preez (2008) views materiality as vital to the very existence of art. When the concept of an art object is embodied by the medium used the viewer needs to look at both the concept and medium equally; and therefore if the medium is changed, consequentially the concept changes too (du Preez 2008:30). Du Preez concludes that medium and concept should not be separated, and that the ability of art objects to embody their concepts through their materiality contributes to their significance (du Preez 2008:37).

While this approach to materiality is pertinent to this particular study it does not fully encapsulate the entirety of the issues of materiality I wish to interrogate. The interpretation of materiality in material culture theory offers additional considerations in the discussion of materiality in my creative practice. Joanna Sofaer (2007) illustrates the approach taken to materiality in a material culture context. This approach emphasizes how people relate to material objects in society. Materiality does not just function through provoking aesthetic responses in viewers but also through transmitting encoded meanings, messages and identities (Sofaer 2007:2). In this social context objects become active role players in

constructing societies and relationships between people in these societies. In this sense objects have the power to influence the understanding and perception of reality as well as a person's identity and social standing. As this identity is constructed by the object, the line between the object and subject is blurred. The object starts becoming part of the person and identity, and an extension of '*self*' (Sofaer 2007:2). These constructed, embodied identities can relate to individual and group identities, class, political identity, sexuality, gender, occupation and ethnicity (Sofaer 2007:4). This interpretation of materiality encapsulates the concept of embodied action- certain objects are designed in such ways that they force the user to physically embody the traits associated with the user and object. For example, Victorian women were stereotyped as submissive, docile and frivolous; the decorative and restricting styles of their dresses visually identified them as such, and simultaneously forced them into a physical embodiment of these characteristics. Conversely, men were identified as serious and active, and their clothing presented seriousness and allowed greater degrees of physical freedom and activity (Sofaer 2007:3).

Although these two approaches to materiality emphasize differing aspects they can be used in conjunction with one another (Sofaer 2007:3). I will make use of both approaches in constructing historical and conceptual frameworks for my media and apply this when critically engaging with my creative practice to understand how one's media can significantly contribute to concept.

## **Themes and Concepts**

The concept for my creative practice grew out of my conflicting phobia and love of moths. My earliest response to this in my art-making was an installation of suspended ceramic cocoon forms. During a particularly painful period in my life I distracted myself with research into the lives of moths. I delved deeper into understanding the biological and biochemical aspects of their existence. Despite my phobia the moth came to represent future hope and escape from a trying reality and I drew connections between the very mysterious, secretive lives of moths and similarly hidden facets of human nature. Over time I developed a conceptual framework that explored metamorphosis and catharsis, in connection with the moth, as healing processes that people undergo to recover from trauma and abuse. These concepts of metamorphosis, catharsis and healing are used in my practice to tackle issues of how women experience abuses and gender-based violence in South

Africa. My personal experiences of an abusive relationship and helping friends through dealing with their own traumas have driven me to use my creative practice as a channel for confronting and making people aware of these serious problems that permeate South African society. The personal becomes the political.

The background research to my themes of metamorphosis, catharsis and healing are drawn out here. This information has been included as the information gleaned from the research process has been integral to the development of the creative practice, and contributes to a fuller understanding of the practice.

### **Scientific Themes**

During this elementary research I turned to a collection of scanning electron microscope (SEM) images, drawings and photographs of moth cocoons, embryos and human cellular structures that I had amassed. I began loosely interpreting these source images through various drawing exercises using an array of media from watercolours to pen and ink. As this primary research unfolded I found my focus persistently drawn to forms of bulbous, globular structures such as cell formations, uteruses, developing embryos as well as the original moth cocoon that initiated this conceptual research. The translation of these scientific images into my own set of drawings resulted in the creation of a visual vocabulary that soon came to reference the cluster of themes in my work.

### **Metamorphosis**

The theme of metamorphosis is presented in my creative practice as both literal and metaphorical.

The literal understanding of metamorphosis is based on the biochemical transformation of moths. Moths undergo what is known as a complete metamorphosis (Kellogg 1906:150) whereby the larva (immature insect) transforms into the imago (adult insect) (Gilbert and Schneiderman 1961:11). After the process has reached completion and the adult has exited the pupa radical differences can be observed between the larva and imago (Gilbert and Schneiderman 1961:11). This biochemical process takes place in two stages. The first stage is the deconstruction of the larval body. Some organs stay intact (Yong 2013); other tissues that need to make way for new structures will disintegrate almost completely via the process of histolysis (Kellogg 1906:150; Gilbert and Schneiderman 1961:11; Yong

2013). Scientists often refer to the pupal body as being like a ‘*soup*’ at this point (Yong 2013). The second stage is the construction of the new imaginal (adult) organs. These new organs are generated through the multiplication of cell bundles called histoblasts or imaginal buds. This generative process is known as histogenesis (Kellogg 1906; Gilbert and Schneiderman 1961). The imaginal buds are the cellular structures responsible for the development of imaginal organs. Late in larval development they present as groupings of cells at various points on the larval body where the new imago organs such as wings and antennae will grow. Caterpillars carry around their metamorphic potential before they reach their pupal stage (Yong 2013).

Apart from close scientific observation of moth metamorphosis, it is a largely mysterious, almost magical, transformation. The pupal stage is often referred to as a ‘resting stage’ (University of Kentucky 2016). This quiet hidden process reflects on the response that many people have to emotionally taxing or traumatising events. It is within human nature to withdraw and move into a state of quiet introspection during mourning or trauma recovery and I likened this process with the state of the pupa: outwardly it appears inactive but internally many changes are occurring.

The biochemical processes of histolysis and histogenesis are also significant in my translation of metamorphosis. This deconstruction and reconstruction of the body relates to ideas of catharsis and purgation of emotional and physical build-up. The result of histolytic breakdown is the accumulation of waste larval tissues. Upon the emergence from the pupa or cocoon the moth expels a reddish-brown liquid referred to as meconium, which is composed of these waste tissues. This excretion of built-up physical waste can be paralleled with the Hippocratic context of catharsis through menstruation, vomiting and bowel movements (Jouanna 1999). Interestingly, a human newborn’s first bowel movement is also referred to as meconium.

My interpretation of metamorphosis has also been loosely influenced by Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. The *Metamorphoses*, written in approximately 8 CE, is a poem composed of fifteen books telling stories that work through themes of metamorphosis and transformation. The most noticeable manifestation of this theme is the fact that some characters undergo transformations, often caused by divine intervention. Human characters are turned, literally or symbolically, into animals, plants or other organic matter as

punishments for transgressing boundaries, as a protective device (Ovid 1986) or to reveal a character as who they truly are (Feldherr 2002:170). In addition to these character transformations, presentations of the metamorphic theme occur in the tonal shifts in Ovid's writing, structural changes in the poem as well as the changes of characters' roles between stories. The constant flux within the poem pushes the poem itself into, metaphorically, a metamorphic state (Galinsky 1975:62). These varying manifestations of metamorphosis as a theme open up the ways in which the reader can take in the narrative, in turn inviting them to metamorphose their own reception of the poem.

The type of metamorphosis that I am most drawn to in Ovid's writing and that features in my own conceptual framework is the metamorphosis that occurs to protect or save characters. This idea of metamorphosis as an escape mechanism plays a significant role in my concept and reflects on my interpretation of moth pupation as a symbol of human emotional withdrawal from trauma. In this sense the ability to transform or be transformed and take flight from a situation becomes a physical withdrawal where the person is further able to escape their situation. Alongside manifesting this interpretation of metamorphosis, I attempt to present the concept of metamorphosis in other aspects of my creative practice. As Ovid uses tactics in his syntax and the structure of the *Metamorphoses*, I am using media and processes that reflect on states of alteration and transformation.

### **Catharsis and Healing**

The theme of catharsis looks at ideas of both physical and emotional catharsis. Catharsis comes from the Greek word '*kathairein*' meaning '*purgation*' or '*purification*' (Jouanna 1999:157).

Studying the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates during my undergraduate Classics major has influenced my concept of physical catharsis. Physical catharsis is the evacuation and purification of the internal organs (Jouanna 1999:157). Purgation was induced to eliminate excessive build-up of bodily '*humours*', which was believed to cause disease. Hippocrates established the four humours of the body as phlegm, bile, black bile and blood which all needed to be balanced to maintain good health. The elimination of excess humours could be achieved through inducing vomiting, bowel movements and menstruation. Purgatives were natural remedies developed to purge the '*cavities*' of the body (Jouanna 1999:156). The two cavities of the human body were the chest (the upper

cavity) and the stomach and bowels (the lower cavity) (Jouanna 1999:156). The upper cavity was purged using emetics to induce vomiting while the lower cavity was purged using clysters to cause bowel movements (Jouanna 1999:156). The purgation of the head was also sometimes performed whereby sneezing and nasal discharge were induced.

Many illnesses in women were also treated with evacuation of the uterus. Medicinal cocktails were administered to bring on menstruation to evacuate the reproductive organs (Jouanna 1999:175). It was popular medical belief that a regular, heavy menstrual flow was necessary for good health in women. This belief was connected to the idea that women absorbed more fluids than men and therefore needed to menstruate regularly as a way to purge their bodies of excess (King 1998:29). A missed menstrual cycle meant that excess blood could build up and place increased pressure on the internal organs, causing sickness and possible death (King 1998:29). Purgative pessaries composed of various ingredients were inserted vaginally to bring on menstrual bleeding; emetics were also administered for the same effect (King 1998:37).

Emotional catharsis is the relief experienced after the release of emotional build-up (Verona and Sullivan 2008:331). The release of this build-up allows for '*positive change*' and healing (Powell 2007:2). The two parts to emotional catharsis are first the expression of emotion and then the emotional clarity and process of healing it provides (Powell 2007:1). Ancient Greek plays often focused on causing audiences to experience emotional catharsis by inciting in them strong emotional reactions such as grief or anger (Verona and Sullivan 2008:331; Powell 2007:1). This shedding of pent up emotions could be performed in a controlled, ritualised way through the attendance of plays. Aristotle believed that the balancing of emotions was important to people's health (Powell 2007:2). Other cathartic actions might include crying and dancing (Powell 2007:3); the expression of emotions through creative processes can also provide cathartic relief.

The aim of both physical and emotional catharsis is to encourage healing and the restoration of a natural, healthy balance of body and mind. Bundled up with metamorphosis and catharsis I explore ideas of healing processes on both the physical level, with the healing of wounds, and the emotional level, with the recovery from trauma and abuse. I began to use the creative process to facilitate emotional catharsis.

**Iconography**

The visual development of my concept led to an essential, almost stylised, rounded, organic shape translated into 2D and 3D work. As emphasised in the discussion of my scientific themes the globular shapes and structures of cells, embryos, uteruses and other internal organs became the earliest iconography for my creative practice. Both the shape and internal/external division of the moth cocoon and pupa reflects these organic forms. The process of physical catharsis expelling bodily fluids is messy, and this mess of fluid leaves behind stains that remind of the experience. This stain imagery forms part of my iconography, at once being a symbol of catharsis while also reflecting back on the forms of cells, uteruses and moth cocoons. I use this icon to encapsulate the themes of metamorphosis, catharsis and healing; it is the cell, the uterus, the cocoon, the stain.

## Chapter Two

This chapter serves to situate and contextualise my creative practice. Firstly the history and materiality of my media will be investigated in the sections ‘Textile Crafts in the Lives of Women’ and ‘Ceramic Histories’. Following this, the feminist artworks *The Dinner Party* and *Womanhouse* will be discussed; the practice of Louise Bourgeois will also be examined. The information drawn out in this chapter will form a practical framework and be a point of reference in the discussion of my practice in Chapter Three.

### Textile Crafts in the Lives of Women

Over the centuries textile crafts like sewing, knitting, quilting and embroidery have become synonymous with feminine domesticity and amateur ‘crafty’ pursuits. These ideas associated with textiles have resulted in them being considered of lower value in both the ‘art’ and ‘craft’ spheres and rejected entirely by many feminist arguments as tools of patriarchal oppression (Parker 2010:6). This section aims to create an understanding of the materiality of textile crafts. I will broadly look at how and why textile production became categorized as ‘women’s work’ in prehistory and then focus more closely on how textile crafts, particularly embroidery, developed into an appropriate ‘womanly pursuit’ in Western Europe between the 14th and 19th centuries. From this understanding of the encoding of textiles as feminine I will use my practical experience to illustrate how the processes of textile crafts can embody and become a performance of the feminine gender; the *Voortrekker Tapestries* will be discussed as an example from a South African context. I aim to contribute a more personal side to this argument and use my insider knowledge to illustrate the multivalent significance of textiles in the personal lives of women inside and outside the home. Elizabeth Barber (1994:24) validates this use of first-hand practical experience to generate knowledge and uses her own textile weaving skills in her research into the lives of ancient women.

#### An Historical Overview

In *A Note on the Division of Labour by Sex* (1970) Judith Brown proposes that women undertook the work that was compatible with childcare. These activities can be performed in the home or in close proximity to it; they are usually repetitive and do not require the full focus of the participant, thereby allowing her to simultaneously focus on the children;



they can be easily interrupted by childcare and resumed without detriment to the chore; and they do not pose any danger or threat to children (Brown 1970:1075). The earliest forms of textile chores- spinning, weaving and sewing- fit these criteria, as well as other chores such as cooking (Barber 1994:30) and gardening (Barber 1994:76). Through her research Barber (1994:166) has found that tools for textile production and food processing have been discovered side by side in excavations, suggesting that the women performing the tasks placed these conveniently together in the home. It is interesting to note how these criteria identified by Brown are no longer fulfilled during the Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries. Women continued working within textile production at factories, requiring them and their children to be relocated from the home to less safe and less comfortable environments (Barber 1994:33).

While labour was separated by gender, this was not necessarily based on ideas of lesser or greater capabilities and textiles did not always represent a system of restricting or oppressing women. Evidence has been found that in the third millennium BCE in Mesopotamia some women enjoyed a certain degree of independence (although not equal to their male counterparts) provided by their production of textiles, where they were present at public markets to trade and sell their wares for a profit they kept to run their homes (Barber 1994:169-174). In contrast Athenian women of the 5th century BCE were restricted to the home to weave and make clothing for the household, allowed only to enter public life for significant religious festivals (Barber 1994:273).

Examining the development of English embroidery production provides insights into how textile crafts were further cemented as 'women's work' after the ancient requirements of subsistence lifestyles fell away. In the Middle Ages, embroidery workshops were established in urban locations or attached to monasteries and convents (Parker 2010:17). These workshops were run by men and employed both men and women (nuns and women from outside the church) to embroider commissioned textiles for clothing and church vestments (V & A Museum 2014). In the mid-13th to mid-14th centuries the *Opus Anglicum* (English Work) produced was given status equal to painting, sculpture (Parker 2010:17) and goldsmithing (V & A Museum 2014). Additionally many queens and noble women of the time undertook ecclesiastic embroidery commissions as a pastime. There are many references to queens who wove, sewed and embroidered and taught these skills to other women, receiving great praise for their work (Lucie-Smith 1981:115; Jones

1969:25). A significant example is Queen Matilda, wife of William the Conqueror, who is historically associated with the creation of the *Bayeux Tapestry*. The *Bayeux Tapestry*, completed circa 1080, is technically an embroidery and is composed of wool thread worked onto a linen panel 82 meters long and 50 centimeters tall (Parker 2010:27). The scenes within the embroidery depict the events of 1064 to 1066 that led up to the Battle of Hastings. The embroidery is now considered to have been commissioned by the French for the Cathedral at Bayeux and made as a professional artwork by men and women workshop embroiderers in Canterbury, England (Parker 2010:27); it has also been suggested that the work was designed by a male artist who employed female embroiderers (Guerrilla Girls 1998:21).

Once church workshops had ceased embroidery production, the tradition of queens and noble women undertaking weaving, sewing and embroidery continued to endure through and beyond the Middle Ages. The Christian doctrine that had developed over time influenced this, teaching that idle women should be viewed with suspicion while the ideal woman kept herself occupied with her textile work (Lucie-Smith 1981:116). This coding of textile crafts as appropriate occupation for women fed into the gendering of textiles in the 19th century.

The 19th century saw the Arts and Crafts Movement, the revival of Medieval church embroidery and the assertion of sewing and embroidery as a feminine duty. The ideologies of the Arts and Crafts Movement emphasized nostalgia for the past and a move away from mass production and perfect replication. A '*celebration*' of the handmade included a return to the church embroidery of the Middle Ages and the revival resulted in a number of needlework schools being established (Jones 1969:44). Victorian society was divided into gendered spaces, with the home designated as a woman's '*proper place*' (Osaki 1988:225). Within these spaces particular performances and presentations of gender took place. Women's identities were defined by their roles within the home in relation to other people- they were wives, mothers, daughters and sisters- and were performed through appropriate duties (Osaki 1988:225). Through the revival of Medieval embroidery and the somewhat skewed revising of the history of the Middle Ages the Victorians presented embroidery as a craft that had been practiced by women for centuries, essentially feminine (through the removal of male embroiderers from Medieval history) and therefore a suitable and praiseworthy activity for Victorian women (Parker 2010). The image of the Medieval

queen seeing to her embroidery was particularly idealized and stereotyped; it was consistently asserted that the *Bayeux Tapestry* was created by Queen Matilda alone, without the involvement of professional embroiderers, as an activity rather than artwork. This position reinforced the 19th century feminine ideal of the lone woman nobly laboring over her needlework (Parker 2010:26-28). The Medieval queen embroiderer became the ‘*blueprint*’ for Victorian wives (Parker 2010:24). These 19th century convictions of both the feminine gender and embroidery influenced attitudes in the 20th century and are still evident in the 21st century.

### **Materiality and Embodied Action**

As objects embody meanings and ideas they grow in their material power to create and alter identities, and in turn they become extensions of the identities and the people themselves (Sofaer 2007:2). As can be seen, textile crafts became so intertwined with Victorian feminine stereotypes that they grew into an embodiment of femininity and of women; if the embroidering women were to be removed from a scene of textile activity the embroidered articles would still be read as a presentation of ‘woman’. Through my practice I have experienced the embodied action of many textile crafts. The feminine stereotype was presented as docile, inactive, quiet, domestic, delicate, mindless and frivolous. The physical processes of textile crafts generally require one to be sitting to work and need very little movement apart from the hands (inactive, quiet, docile); they originally were performed in the home, for the home, and continue to be (domestic); they are typically very repetitive (mindless); small hand gestures are needed to create neat stitches (delicate); and apart from the functional aspect of sewing to create wearable clothes, many embroidery designs and patterns are purely decorative (frivolous). Textile crafts were symbolically encoded and at the same time became a physical performance of the feminine stereotype.

### **The Voortrekker Tapestries**

Providing a South African context, the *Voortrekker Tapestries* demonstrate the Afrikaner *volksmoeder* (‘mother of the nation’) ideology through depicting the roles of 19th century Voortrekker women and by using the medium of embroidery. According to the Voortrekker Monument Museum the tapestry project was first proposed in 1952 by Nellie Kruger of the *Vrou-en-Moederbeweging* (‘*Women and Mothers’ Movement*’, translation van der Watt 1996:2) as a commemoration of women’s roles during the Great Trek. Artist

Willem Hermanus Coetzer designed the 15 panels. Like the *Bayeux Tapestry*, the *Voortrekker Tapestry* is technically a series of embroideries. Nine women embroiderers were involved; the project took eight years to complete and was presented to the Voortrekker Monument in 1960.

The *volksmoeder* ideology was created by the *Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging* ('*Afrikaans Christian Women's Society*', translation du Toit 2003:155) between the 1910s and 1930s (du Toit 2003, van der Watt 1996). The *volksmoeder* had duties to the church, her people and her language (du Toit 2003:163) and was stereotyped as noble, passive, nurturing, protective, maternal, pious and patriotic (du Toit 2003:156, 158). Through her domesticity the *volksmoeder* had the power to contribute to the future of the Afrikaner nation by raising children and keeping the home; her maternalism extended to the public sphere through charity work and care for the poor (van der Watt 1996:51). These ideas influenced Coetzer in his designing of the tapestry panels, and van der Watt argues that the *volksmoeder* ideology reached its height in the 1950s with the commission of the Voortrekker tapestry (van der Watt 1996:55). It is interesting to note the division of labour: a man took on the role of artist to create the original designs of the tapestries, while the women became the craftspeople who executed the artist's original designs in embroidery.

Each panel of the Voortrekker tapestry depicts both the men and women on the Great Trek. Their roles are illustrated as separate gendered spheres that contrast but complement each other, with the men as patriarchs and women as the loyal supporters of their quests (van der Watt 1996: 60), as *volksmoeders*. These women are shown providing support and assistance to their husbands, maintaining the home (the ox-wagon), nurturing children and engaging in religious worship, for the future of their people; they embody themes of settling and domestication (van der Watt 1996: 61). In the tapestry scenes the women are often seen surrounded by material markers of domesticity, as in *The Exodus* (Figure 1) or performing domestic chores, as in *The Outspan at Thaba'Nchu* (Figure 2). Many of the women wear embroidered *kappies* (bonnets), which had become symbolically associated with the *volksmoeder* in the 1920s (van der Watt 1996:50).



**Figure 1.** W. H. Coetzer and J. W. Prinsloo. *The Exodus*, 1952- 1960. Embroidered tapestry wool on canvas, 81,3 x 197 cm. Collection: Voortrekker Monument. Photo: Paul Clark. Photo taken and reproduced with permission from Etta Judson of the Voortrekker Monument.



**Figure 2.** W. H. Coetzer and H. Rossouw, *The Outspan at Thaba'Nchu*, 1952- 1960, Embroidered tapestry wool on canvas, 81,3 x 197 cm. Collection: Voortrekker Monument. Photo: Paul Clark. Photo taken and reproduced with permission from Etta Judson of the Voortrekker Monument.

The fact that the *volksmoeder* ideology is expressed in the medium of embroidery adds to the message. According to van der Watt (1996:99) the fact of the time taken to complete the embroideries is always stated in discussions about them; the labour intensiveness of the work contributed to the Voortrekker Monument by the women represents the contribution of Afrikaner women on a larger scale. The embroiderers of the tapestries perform the *volksmoeder* ideals. Through their commitment to the project, years of work and quiet toiling away they become the *volksmoeders* they portray, making their contribution to Afrikaner nationalism. Through the association of embroidery with femininity, the Voortrekker Tapestries create the presence of women in the otherwise androcentric Voortrekker Monument (van der Watt 1996:108).

### **Personal Meanings**

The gendering of textile crafts in combination with gendered spaces created a very specific role for women to perform within and became a tool that constructed identities that played to feminine ideologies. From an alternative standpoint I have found that these textile crafts can also contribute to women's lives in positive ways. While there is the tension of an oppressive, gendered history I do believe that an inclusive discussion that asks why women have continued to use textiles as an expressive medium offers greater understanding on the impact of textile crafts in the personal lives of women. I have found that textile crafts could offer women a number of benefits that include bonding with family members and friends, and creative emotional therapy. In her article *Women's Studies in the Core Curriculum: Using Women's Textile Work to Teach Women's Studies and Feminist Theory* (1995) Gender Studies lecturer Brenda Phillips invited students to each bring an item of textile work made by an everyday woman and talk about these items; through these group discussion they revealed that these crafts can symbolise and embody deeper emotional meanings.

At times when sewing and embroidery were considered womanly duties to be performed in the home mothers would teach these skills to their daughters in preparation for 'womanhood' and marriage (Osaki 1988:225). While this did essentially perpetuate gender roles at the same time it also symbolised (and still can symbolise) the connection between mothers and daughters and several generations through the passing down of a skill (Osaki 1988:225). In my own family my grandmother sews and embroiders and taught these skills to her daughters; of her four daughters only my mother continues to sew on a very regular basis and my sister and I were exposed to this for as long as we can remember. The sewing and embroidery skills I use today were learnt from women in my family. The continuation of textile crafts between generations has lost its sense of duty and has become an enjoyable profession and pastime. On a personal level I feel a connection with my mother, grandmothers and great-grandmother through my textile crafts and their continuation becomes a symbolic honoring of these women; I make for myself but I also make for them. On an emotional level textile crafts can provide a form of therapy and many women I have spoken to say that the crafts they use offer therapeutic benefits. An examination of letters sent between a 19th century woman, Eleuthera du Pont, and her friends and family reveal that while Eleuthera considered her sewing as work, she also enjoyed it for its emotional benefits and used it as a form of retreat (Osaki 1988:240).

My creative practice encompasses the exploration of the materiality and the emotional symbolism of embroidery and textile crafts. I have found that the processes of embroidery and sewing can be very cathartic through their repetition- this is central to my investigation. These histories and personal meanings are invoked to create deeper, multivalent meanings within my practice.

## **Ceramic Histories**

The production of ceramic wares has spanned tens of thousands of years. Over the centuries ceramic production has developed extensively to demonstrate great technical achievements, embody meanings in clay and become surrounded by ideological debate. This section will provide insights into various aspects of ceramics and will serve to contextualise the ceramic works of my creative practice. I will first look at the role of women in ceramic production in the late-19th and 20th centuries in British potteries, and compare and contrast this with the pottery established by a group of women in 1925 in Olifantsfontein, South Africa. I will provide a historical context for the Ceramics Studio at the Centre for Visual Arts, my institution of study, and look at the establishment of a British ceramic education at the studio. The history of porcelain and its production will be investigated. The various material qualities and values attached to porcelain specifically, and clay generally, will be discussed in addition to the historical survey. Finally I will look broadly at how ceramics have contributed to and been influenced by art/craft debates.

### **Women in British Potteries**

It is believed that during the earliest time of ceramic production work was divided by gender. Men typically became throwers and worked at wheels while women undertook hand-building projects. As with the production of textiles, using hand-building techniques fitted in with child-rearing responsibilities (Cooper 2000:8). It is very significant that even in the 20th century gendered divisions were still imposed in the production lines of established potteries.

In the period of 1870 to 1955 women represented half of the workforce in the British pottery industry and held both skilled and unskilled positions. Women had greater chances of being in unskilled positions, operating as assistants to skilled male potters (Buckley

1990:1). They could work at all stages of ceramic production but never independently and only in assistance to male workers (Buckley 1990:21). Economic privilege and greater access to art school education increased women's opportunities of being employed as skilled decorators within potteries (Buckley 1990:5). Therefore painters usually came from wealthy families and working-class women held the majority of the unskilled positions (Buckley 1990:36). Women workers were also held back by the fact that, unless they had the opportunity to learn ceramic decorating skills, they could not do apprenticeships within positions considered unsuitable for women, meaning that despite any amount of practical experience gained on the job working-class women were always considered '*unskilled*' (Buckley 1990:23). Regardless of skill and educational background all positions held by women navigated issues of patriarchy within design industries and women workers' contributions and successes were determined by the appropriate gender roles of the time.

Gender roles within society defined the potential occupations and the perceived physical and intellectual capabilities of men and women. Across class divides the women were positioned in the domestic, amateur realm and men in the public, professional realm (Buckley 1990:2). These social roles permeated the working world. While male workers were involved in the designing and making of ceramic forms, female workers were employed in the decorating of ceramic surfaces, and occasionally in the designing of surface decoration (Buckley 1990:4). Due to the perceived domesticity of women, their creative skills were defined as '*natural*' and '*innate*', and their work considered '*decorative*', '*delicate*' and '*meticulous*' (Buckley 1990:3). As with embroidery of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was established that these aesthetic traits and the skills required to execute the designs were inherent to women's femininity, thereby making them more biologically suited to performing certain aspects of design work (Buckley 1990:3). In the amateur realm of ceramic decoration upper- and middle-class Victorian women did decorative china painting, demonstrating at home the feminine ideal of '*tireless industry, patience and dexterity*' (Buckley 1990:6).

With the employment of women in potteries came the tension of navigating the separation of public and private spaces. The tradition of women working within the domestic home was challenged by women working in public spaces previously dominated by men and it was repeatedly asserted that employed women were threats to themselves, the home and to



society (Buckley 1990:25). In an attempt to address this many potteries made separate spaces for women decorators to work away from the men (Buckley 1990). This upsetting of established male/female roles and the establishment of private spaces within public realms is noteworthy, especially in the investigation of binary oppositions.

The Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain contributed to an increase in opportunities for women pottery workers. The philosophies of the movement resulted in a growth of the hand painting sections in potteries, which in turn increased the employment rate of women painters and designers in potteries (Buckley 1990:6). The Art Pottery Movement saw the establishment of small, independent potteries and a number of women began working with the design and making of forms in addition to surface decoration (Buckley 1990:6, 70).

### **The Women of Olifantsfontein**

The Ceramic Studio at Olifantsfontein provides a South African context and an interesting comparison and contrast to the potteries of Britain in the early 20th Century. The Ceramic Studio was originally established as Cullinan Pottery by the Cullinan family; the factory closed in 1914 and was left abandoned. In 1925 ceramists Gladys Short and Marjorie Johnstone moved from Durban to Olifantsfontein (in the previous Transvaal, now Gauteng) and revived the old pottery, re-establishing it as the Ceramic Studio. Both Short and Johnstone studied at what was then known as Durban School of Art; additionally Short studied at the Royal College of Art, London. A year later Joan Methley, a fellow graduate from both Durban School of Art and Royal College of Art, joined them. Audrey Frank later replaced Johnstone. It was Short, Methley and Frank who built the studio up to its success between 1926 and 1955 (Hillebrand 1991:4). Thelma Newlands-Currie later joined the three in 1928 (Hillebrand 1991:17).

According to recollections of Royal College of Art graduates, ceramics classes at the school were very much influenced by the division of labour in British potteries. Students learnt painting and decorating techniques by painting on pre-made vessels and tiles, rather than practicing throwing and other processes (Hillebrand 1991:10). However it appears this would have differed somewhat at Durban School of Art due to the particular divisions of apartheid South Africa (Bucknell 2014:62). Despite these foundations Short, Methley, Frank and Newlands-Currie were competent in and contributed to all stages of production at the Olifantsfontein studio. The ceramists made tiles, modeled pieces for architectural

faience, made moulds (Hillebrand 1991:11), packed and unpacked kilns (Hillebrand 1991:12), made glazes and applied them to works (Hillebrand 1991:7) and created and painted oxide designs (Hillebrand 1991:8). Thrown pieces were also made by them before they hired a professional thrower in 1926 (Gers 2016:13). In its time the Ceramic Studio produced tiles, vases, functional tableware, architectural faience, glazed garden sculpture, as well as significant commissions for public buildings (Gers 2016:7-8).

In addition to their control of the creative output at the Ceramic Studio the four women managed the business of the studio. Gladys Short is especially recognized for her management and bookkeeping of the business (Hillebrand 1991:13, 18) and she represented the studio in liaison with architects and officials involved in commissions (Hillebrand 1991:5-6). This degree of independence and power from a group of women was out of the norm for South African society in the 1920s. According to Hillebrand this did mean that the ceramists were a target for patronizing critique and were viewed as '*curiosities*' (Hillebrand 1991:5).

Through their studies at the Durban Art School the ceramists at Olifantsfontein were influenced stylistically and ideologically by John Adams, who had established the school (Bucknall 2014:59). Ceramic practice was emphasized (Bucknall 2014:58) and Adams taught technical skills including throwing, turning, earthenware glazing and oxide painting (Vurovecz 2008:26). Adams established a British style of teaching at The Durban Art School that still endures today at the Ceramics Studio at the Centre for Visual Arts, forming the context of my own education in ceramics.

### **The Ceramics Studio at the Centre for Visual Arts**

John Oxley took over the head position at The Durban Art School after Adams left. In 1936 the school was moved to Pietermaritzburg where it was integrated into the Natal University College (now University of KwaZulu-Natal) (Bucknall 2014:68-70). In Pietermaritzburg the school became the Fine Arts Department (Bucknall 2014:69) and today is known as the Centre for Visual Arts (CVA). British-style curricula and teaching methods introduced by Adams and Oxley still play a role at the CVA today, as does the promotion of craft and design philosophies (Bucknall 2014:70).

The Ceramics Studio at the Fine Arts Department was developed extensively by Hilda Ditchburn, who received her Bachelor of Arts in Fine Arts in 1938 under the lectureship of John Oxley (Bucknall 2014:111). In the years 1947 to 1949 Ditchburn studied at The Central School in London under Dora Billington. There she learned glaze chemistry and stoneware techniques, which Ditchburn brought back to the Ceramics Studio, and expanded the potential for production (Bucknall 2014:111-112). Additionally Ditchburn would have been exposed to the practices of British potters Bernard Leach and Michael Cardew. The influences of John Oxley and Dora Billington on Ditchburn and her transference of their ceramic philosophies result in a very distinct link between British ceramic traditions and the teaching of ceramics at the Ceramics Studio of the CVA. Work produced at the studio today is still influenced by these philosophies and traditions in varying degrees, and coupled with indigenous and contemporary knowledge of ceramics, results in unique, individual creative practices of students and lecturers alike.

In about 1971 Ditchburn introduced porcelain at the studio for ceramics students (Rall 2014:27). Juliet Armstrong, ceramist and lecturer at the Ceramics Studio, extensively developed the use of porcelain and bone china in her own work. Armstrong completed her Bachelor of Arts in Fine Arts in 1972 and her Master of Arts in Fine Arts in 1982, both at the Ceramics Studio at the then University of Natal (now University of KwaZulu-Natal). She lectured at the Ceramics Studio from 1977 until her passing in 2012 (Bell and Clark 2014: 123). During her time at the studio Armstrong's research and practice with porcelain and bone china inspired and influenced many of her students who have gone on to utilise these media in their own work.

### **Meanings in Porcelain**

Porcelain's history and development in Europe and Britain is one surrounded by issues of power and wealth. In conjunction with the physical attributes associated with it, porcelain has intriguing layers of materiality that I wish to explore and understand. With this knowledge, I will unpack its role in my creative practice.

Porcelain was first discovered and produced in China (Cooper 2000:160). In the 17<sup>th</sup> century porcelain wares were shipped to European countries from China by the East India Company (Doherty 2002:14). The European demand for porcelain was ever-increasing; it became highly valued and prized, and porcelain collections signified the wealth and

privilege of the owners (Cooper 2000:160). It was this commercial value that drove European investigation into its manufacture (Doherty 2002:14). The experimental nature of this early research resulted in high losses and expenses for factories; very few remained open for significant periods of time (Doherty 2002:14). Despite this there were still many great technical developments in British porcelain manufacture. Bone china was developed in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century and later refined by Josiah Spode (Doherty 2002:15).

Another incentive driving the manufacture of porcelain in Britain and Europe was the importing of exotic foods and beverages from colonies. Tea, coffee and chocolate grew in popularity amongst the upper classes, resulting in a demand for attractive caddies and vessels to contain and consume these products (Cooper 2000:161). Porcelain became a symbol of power and wealth through its monetary value, mediating owners' experiences of colonial power through consumption of imported foodstuffs. Ceramist Michelle Erickson speaks to these connections in her work and notices how porcelain plays a role in the web of industrialism, trade and slave labour. These links are further reinforced by the fact that European porcelain was sent to colonies and used in colonial homes (Erickson 2015). Porcelain domestic wares reminded families of home, but also quietly stated European power and rule.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Nazi Germany the Allach porcelain manufacturer used porcelain as a means of expressing political ideologies. The factory produced unglazed and white-glazed figurines depicting wild and domestic animals, people who represented Nazi '*super-race*' ideals, and military personnel (de Waal 2015:353-354). These figurines were given as gifts by authorities, validating the recipients while also spreading the ideologies of the party. The material attributes of porcelain made it the perfect creative vehicle for such ideologies, and an Allach catalogue expressed that '*white porcelain is the embodiment of the German soul*' (de Waal 2015:356).

The material attributes associated with porcelain are '*delicacy, translucency, fineness, whiteness, density and purity*' (Lane 1995:7); Frisinger adds '*strength*' to this list in her use of porcelain paperclay (Frisinger 2012:21). The addition of cellulose fibre to porcelain creates a material that is not only delicate and fine but also flexible and strong. These characteristics of porcelain and porcelain paperclay are technical values that ceramists aim to achieve in their use of porcelain as a material. In turn these technical values translate

into metaphors that contribute to the themes of the work. The studio-based research process has allowed me to experiment with porcelain paperclay and increase my understanding of its physical materiality.

### **Ceramics and Art/Craft Debates**

The making of ceramic work, in its many forms, has been a significant part of art/craft debates in two ways. In the larger scheme of the 'art world', ceramics have historically been taken less seriously than other genres, such as painting, and are often excluded on the grounds that too much emphasis is placed on technical aspects to the detriment of critical engagement (de Waal 2003:174). Firstly, within the ceramics communities of 1970s Britain, Japan and America, a divide grew between academically supported ceramics and studio ceramics (de Waal 2003:173); according to Wilma Cruise this occurred in South African ceramics in the 1980s (Frisinger 2012:28). The term 'studio ceramics' came to differentiate functional ceramic wares from non-functional sculptural pieces (de Waal 2003:173). Secondly, ceramic artists began intentionally to use clay in ways that subverted the roles and categories created for ceramics. Clay was used in performance pieces, installations and conceptual pieces, both inside and outside of galleries. The over-arching intent was to move away from the functional confines of studio ceramics (de Waal 2003:174). Ceramics also became a vehicle for exploring gender and sexuality and many ceramists confronted the patriarchal history of Western ceramics through their work (de Waal 2003: 204, 205). Elements of risk and chance also became tools for many ceramists to move their practices away from the domestic and towards the sculptural by bending technical rules that functional wares were bound by (de Waal 2003:213).

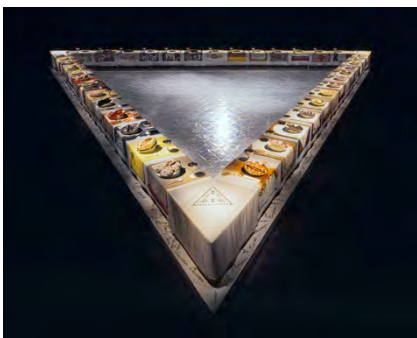
In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, ceramist Grayson Perry's presence in the established art world caused art/craft debates to resurface on a grander scale. Perry's winning of the Turner Prize in 2003 was considered quite controversial due to his practice utilising craft media. This subversion of constructed art/craft categories incited debate, questioning the position of ceramics in the context of 'fine art' and the relevance of such boundaries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Perry himself is aware of the tension created by the presence of 'craft' in 'fine art' galleries, believing that '*anything goes*' and stating that '*even pottery has been declared art*' (Perry 2013).

The practical component of my research has led to me delving deeper into aspects of ceramic history and production. In turn, this discussion assists in understanding the materiality of ceramics, and porcelain in particular. This will form a significant part of the analysis of my practice as I examine how the materiality of porcelain contributes to the practice.

### ***The Dinner Party***

*The Dinner Party* is a monumental installation created by feminist artist Judy Chicago in collaboration with over 400 other artists and craftspeople. Created between 1974 and 1979 the artwork is iconic of the 1970s feminist art movement and was made to honour significant women in Western history. While *The Dinner Party* has been met with extensive criticism for several reasons, including the exclusivity of those represented in the artwork as well as the essentialist vaginal imagery used, it remains remarkable for its scale and undertaking for the time. *The Dinner Party* provides an important framework for my research due to its feminist content and use of ceramics, textiles and needlework on such an immense scale within a ‘fine art’ context.

Housed at the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum in New York, *The Dinner Party* presents a banquet hosting thirty-nine women of historical significance seated at a triangular table (Figure 3). Chicago (2012) states that the triangular



**Figure 3.** Judy Chicago. *The Dinner Party*, 1974 – 1979. Mixed media, 14,6 x 14,6 m. Collection: The Brooklyn Museum, Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art. © Judy Chicago. Photo: Donald Woodman.  
<http://www.judychicago.com/gallery/the-dinner-party/dp-artwork/>

shape of the table references the early use of the triangle as a symbol for the feminine, and it represents the equality that the feminist movement strives to achieve. Each side, or ‘wing’, of the table is divided into thirteen place settings, referencing the thirteen people present at the Last Supper, and Chicago refers to *The Dinner Party* as a ‘reinterpretation of the Last Supper from the point of view of those who have done the cooking throughout history’ (Chicago 2012). The triangular floor space within the open centre of the table is covered with cast porcelain tiles and is referred to as the *Heritage Floor*. The tiles are painted with the names of 999 women who

also contributed to history in similar ways as the women at the table.



**Figure 4.** Judy Chicago. Installation view of Wing Three, featuring Virginia Woolf and Georgia O'Keeffe place settings from *The Dinner Party*, 1979. Porcelain and needlework. Collection: The Brooklyn Museum, Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art. © Judy Chicago. Photo: Donald Woodman.

<http://www.judychicago.com/gallery/the-dinner-party/dp-artwork/>

Each wing of the table represents a particular period of time in Western history: the first wing denotes the beginning of time to the end of the Classical period; the second wing moves from the beginnings of Christianity to the Reformation; and the third wing runs from the American Revolution through to the present time in the 1970s. The women represented at *The Dinner Party* are seated according to the period of history they contributed to. At each of the thirty-nine place settings there is a painted ceramic plate, a ceramic chalice, utensils, an embroidered napkin and an embroidered table-runner (Chicago 2012) (Figure 4).

Chicago had the assistance of ceramists in the making of the ceramic plates and she did apprenticeships with experienced china painters for the painting of the plates. The plates are sculpted and painted as ambiguous butterfly- and flower-like vaginal forms. These plates have been highly criticized as an overly essentialist component of *The Dinner Party* (Jones 1996:22, 25). While the use of 'craft' materials and techniques was intended to subvert the imposed restrictions of the 'art' world, Chicago did express her frustrations with the amateur context that the china painters worked and exhibited in, wanting them to show their work at galleries (Chicago 1996). Similarly, in a video walkthrough of *The Dinner Party* she states that she desired to transform the technique of china painting into a flexible 'art' form that she could use (Chicago 2012). This sheds light on the divisions that are questioned by art/craft debates as well as the tension of simultaneously attempting to subvert established hierarchies in the art world while finding recognition from within it.

Beneath each ceramic plate lies a table runner. The runners are decorated using needlework relevant to the time of the woman they represent and they demonstrate a wide range of techniques including felting, appliqué and embroidery. The front of each runner is embroidered with the name of the woman it seats. They depict the environment and context each women lived in and the designs created for them reference both personal and

historical aspects of the women's lives (Chicago 2012). The backs of the runners that face inwards towards the *Heritage Floor* give further information on the lives of the women and what they contributed and achieved. The runners were intentionally placed in a way that would make it difficult for the full stories of the women's lives to be viewed, as a metaphor for how the achievements of women have historically gone unnoticed and unrecorded (Chicago 2012).

In addition to the fact that needlework and ceramics were used in the making of *The Dinner Party*, the involvement of 'amateur' craftspeople from informal backgrounds in the project is significant. Chicago started *The Dinner Party* alone and by the completion of the installation over 400 people had volunteered their skills (Chicago 2012). This included a large number of women who worked on china painting and needlework at home, having learnt these skills through 'hobby' groups and from their own mothers, and could now share and increase their knowledge by participating in the creation of *The Dinner Party*. The idea of women turning their time spent on 'domestic crafts' into opportunities for social and therapeutic group interactions is amplified by the major group effort of *The Dinner Party*. Indeed, Chicago emphasizes this additional benefit of having worked in group settings during the installation's making (Chicago 2012).

Through its use and combining of porcelain, textiles and needlework to subvert art/craft divisions and create a space for the presence of typically 'women's crafts' in a fine art context, *The Dinner Party* provides a very appropriate and critical framework for positioning and understanding my creative practice.

### ***Womanhouse* and the Domestic Setting As Exhibition Space**

*Womanhouse* was a collaborative project led by artists Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro and their students in the Feminist Art Program at the California Institute of the Arts (Demetrakas 1974). The all-female group of art students found an abandoned and dilapidated mansion, which was then donated to the project to be used before its demolition. This became the location of *Womanhouse*, and the participating students renovated the house before working on installations and performance pieces (Chicago and Schapiro 1972). The transformed space was open for viewing between 30 January and 28





**Figure 5.** Janice Lester. *Personal Space* in *Womanhouse*, 1972. Found object and mixed-media installation, Dimensions variable. Collection unknown. Photographer unknown. <http://women-artists.org/post/7865479766/personal-space-1972-janice-lester>



**Figure 6.** Faith Wilding. *Womb Room*, in *Womanhouse*, 1972. Crocheted and knotted yarn and rope, Dimensions variable. Collection unknown. Photographer unknown. [http://www.womanhouse.net/works/dh6s1kz35kj9qsiwvr\\_g6tq2ycbby4z](http://www.womanhouse.net/works/dh6s1kz35kj9qsiwvr_g6tq2ycbby4z)

February 1972, with eighteen display areas in total including bathrooms, cupboards and the garden; the living room was left empty and used for performance pieces (Sider 2010).

*Womanhouse* became a location and experience for both the artists and audiences to confront and unpack the positioning of women as homemakers, wives and mothers, and their confinement to the domestic realm of the home.

Included in *Womanhouse* were the installations *Personal Space*, by Janice Lester (Figure 5), and *Womb Room*, by Faith Wilding (Figure 6). *Personal Space* was based on a dream that Lester had, where she invited guests into her bedroom and then discovered an additional space within the bedroom that only she could enter (Womanhouse 2009). The installation was set up in one of the bedrooms of the mansion, showing a bedroom scene complete with an unmade bed, rug, chair, lamp and curtains; within this scene Lester installed a cylindrical, spiraling space that only she could enter during the exhibition. In the statement that accompanied the installation, Lester states that ‘*the secret room was a trap as well as a sanctuary*’, symbolizing the way women keep their potential trapped inside of them (Womanhouse 2009). In another bedroom, Wilding’s *Womb Room*, or *Crocheted Environment*, transforms the space into a fibrous, web-like cocoon. Lit by a single ceiling lamp the white fibres contrast starkly against the dark walls and floor, emphasizing the beehive shape of the environment. Wilding referenced the shapes and symbolism of ancient ‘*womb-shelters*’ woven by women (Womanhouse 2009). Both of these installations intensify the significance of the interior that is presented by *Womanhouse*.

*Womanhouse* proposed the domestic home as an exhibition space alternative to the ‘art gallery’. This potent location intensified the artists’ aims of unpacking ideas of domesticity and the feminine and suggesting what the home might represent for women. Furthermore, this presentation of ‘art’ within a building designated as a ‘home’ challenges established ideas of where ‘art’ can be made, displayed, viewed and validated. There is the upsetting of binaries, where the private is made public and invaded, and internal secrets are revealed to an unknown audience. *Womanhouse* is an important framework for locating my practice in a wider context in relation to feminist art themes and the use of ‘craft’ materials, as well as for considering and analyzing the display tactics I use for my final exhibition.

## **Louise Bourgeois**

Louise Bourgeois’ artistic practice plays a tremendous role in the direction and development of my Masters creative research. Spanning several decades and art movements, Bourgeois’ oeuvre includes sculpture, painting, drawing, printmaking and fabric works, and resists alignment with any particular movement, style or medium (Kotik, Sultan and Leigh 1994:16). While Bourgeois’ expansive body of work is a constant source of influence, for the purpose of this study I have drawn on the installations referred to as the *Cells*, the fabric works, and the themes explored in these series.

Born in 1911 in Paris, Bourgeois’ childhood, family life and relationships with her parents had an enormous impact on her artist career. Bourgeois was very close to her mother and considered her to be her best friend (Bernadac 1996:147). In contrast she had a very turbulent relationship with her father; he introduced to the family a tutor whom he made his mistress for many years. This act left Bourgeois feeling betrayed, resulting in conflicting feelings of love, hate and distrust towards the paternal figure (Kotik, Sultan and Leigh 1994:19). Bourgeois recalls her father playing a ‘game’ where he would cut the crude form of a woman into an orange peel, situating the stem dimple as the ‘genitals’ of the figure. He would perform this trick and use it to mock Bourgeois and her femaleness (Bernadac 1996:132). The family owned a tapestry repair workshop and from a young age Bourgeois assisted her parents by drawing in the missing sections of tapestries (Bernadac 1996:166). Bourgeois studied art in Paris after completing high school. In 1937 she married American art historian Robert Goldwater; she moved with him to New York in

1938 where she established herself as an artist (Kotik, Sultan and Leigh 1994:9). Bourgeois and Goldwater had three sons (they adopted their eldest shortly before they left France). These biographical details are noteworthy as it is significant that Bourgeois achieved the level of success she did in her lifetime while maintaining the roles of wife and mother (Bernadac 1996:170).

These experiences in Bourgeois' life, from her awkward family life and relationships, working in the tapestry workshop, to her expectations as wife and mother, greatly influenced the thematic explorations in her creative oeuvre. Bourgeois deals with marriage, sex, pregnancy, motherhood and domesticity (Cheim Read 2011); the confrontation of painful traumas and memories; healing and repairing (Bernadac 1996:8); the connection between the house and the body (Bernadac 1996:122); the body as a site for negotiating emotion and pain (Kotik, Sultan and Leigh 1994:24); and the cell as a metaphor for life, death, safety and entrapment (Bal 2001:69). Coupled with a probing of gender and sexuality Bourgeois expresses the 'femaleness' of experience. While she did not identify herself as feminist her work has been viewed as proto-feminist (DiTolla 2016), exploring issues of sexuality and gender from the 1940s onwards and foregrounding the feminist art movement of the 1970s (Kotik, Sultan and Leigh 1994:16).



**Figure 7.** Louise Bourgeois. *Cell 1*, 1991. Mixed media, 210,8 x 243,8 x 274,3 cm. Collection unknown. © Robert Miller Gallery. Photo: P. Bellamy. From: Bernadac, M. (1996) *Louise Bourgeois*, New York: Flammarion. Page 123.

Bourgeois' extensive series of installations reference architecture and the domestic home. Pertinent to my study are *Cells I to VI* (1991) and *Red Rooms* (1994). The *Cells* question the function of the home and explore the tension of 'home' as a site of both comfort and abuse (Bernadac 1996:70) and refer to ambiguous spaces of protection and imprisonment (Bernadac 1996:65).

*Cells I to VI* work together as a narrative with each *Cell* standing as a chapter of the story (Bernadac 1996:128) and alluding to different rooms in the home (Kotik, Sultan and Leigh 1994:26). Viewers can walk amongst the *Cells* and peer inside, but they cannot intervene or participate in what they witness (Bernadac 1996:128). These six *Cells* reference the sensory experience of pain and trauma, either through the evocation of the senses (*Cell II* speaks of the memory of scent, *Cell IV* of hearing) or the deprivation of

sensory stimulation (*Cells I, V and VI*) (Bernadac 1996:122-128). *Cell I* (Figure 7) resembles a bedroom. A series of doors enclose a metal bed frame, which is covered by a roughly textured cloth and a pillow. A low table next to the bed holds a number of glass tubes and flasks. This bedroom setting is surrounded by an atmosphere of tension, where the room presented is recognized as the comfortable bedrooms of our homes and yet does not invite warmth or security.



**Figure 8.** Louise Bourgeois. Red Room (Parents), 1994. Installation, wood, metal, fabric, mirror, 245 x 419 x 419 cm. Collection unknown. © Peter Blum. Photographer unknown. From: Bernadac, M. (1996) *Louise Bourgeois*, New York: Flammarion. Page 150.

*Red Rooms* (1994) comprises two *Cell* installations, both enclosed by a wall of joined doors. *Red Room (Parents)* (Figure 8) contains a double bed and two bedside cabinets. The bed is covered with a sheet; on top of this lies a wooden board painted bright blood red. Two red pillows are arranged at the head of the bed, with one white pillow that reads 'je t'aime' ('I love you'). At the end of the bed lie a musical instrument case and a child's toy. Above the bed hangs a transparent red globular form. Each cabinet holds what appears to be headless draped figures; next to one figure is a small wood and mesh cage-like object. There is a sense of balance in the room, and the message on the pillow suggests peace and love in the marriage (Bernadac 1996:149); in contrast the object looming over the bed and the sharp redness and hardness of the wood on the bed introduce a cold tension to the room. As with *Cell I* we recognize the discomfort within a space intended as a comfortable retreat. More significantly this feeling is shared by a couple. The intense blood-redness also alludes to fertility, sex, pregnancy and childbirth; the home and the uterus become connected through their similar functions (Bernadac 1996:149).

Bourgeois' fabric works explore the same themes as the *Cells* while enhancing the symbolism of textiles and sewing. There is an obvious reference to the tapestry workshop of her childhood, but the use of fabric and the processes of sewing- cutting, stitching, mending, bringing together- come to signify emotional and psychological repair and healing (Cheim Read 2011). Furthermore the act of weaving and sewing and the tools used stand as symbols of Bourgeois' mother and women in general: '*All the women in my house were using needles. I've always had a fascination with the needle. The needle is used to*

*repair the damage... It is never aggressive, it's not a pin'* (Louise Bourgeois, Bernadac 1996:144). The work of women becomes synonymous with healing and repair.

In both her 2D and 3D fabric work Bourgeois utilized found, collected and used fabric, ranging from household linens to personal items like her clothing and husband's handkerchiefs (Cheim Read 2011). The use of these collected and used fabrics lends weight to Bourgeois' textile work as they churn up ideas of memory (MoMa 2016) and inherited identity. Works made with these fabrics become processes of introspection and reflection (Cheim Read 2011); they also transform private personal items into objects for public viewing, which plays with the house binary of internal/external and concealed/revealed.



**Figure 9.** Louise Bourgeois. *Ode À L'oubli*, 2002. Fabric book with found fabric collages, ink additions and lithograph, 28 x 31 x 4,5 cm. Collection: Museum of Modern Art. © 2016 The Easton Foundation. Photo: Christopher Burke. [http://www.moma.org/collection\\_lb/browse\\_results.php?object\\_id=98440](http://www.moma.org/collection_lb/browse_results.php?object_id=98440)

*Ode À L'oubli* ('Ode to Forgetting') (Figure 9) is the first textile book in Bourgeois' series of fabric works. The book comprises 35 pages, 32 of which are fabric collages. The pages are made with linen hand-towels from Bourgeois' wedding trousseau (the monogram 'L.B.G' can be seen on each page) and the compositions incorporate old clothing and household objects (MoMa 2016). Geometric shapes and patterns are the basis of most of the page compositions and allude to the angles and lines of weaving. In contrast a small number of the page designs are quite organic, made up of globular and fibrous forms that reference the inner workings of the body. Bourgeois' use of wedding trousseau linens adds greatly to the many layers of *Ode À L'oubli* and weaves meaning into the narrative process of excavating past traumas, learning how to repair emotional wounds and allowing 'scars' to fade. These linens represent womanhood and the expectations of women in marriage and motherhood. This process of 'forgetting' becomes linked with specifically female experiences.

Louise Bourgeois' practice provides a practical and theoretical context for my research. The fabric works contribute to my own investigation into the materiality of fabric in art-making, while the *Cells* are a point of reference for the concepts of home and domesticity

that are present in the arranging and presenting of my exhibition. These connections will be further drawn out in the discussion of my practice in Chapter Three.

## Chapter Three

This chapter incorporates discussions of the works made during the studio-based research and the final exhibition of the works.

### **The Studio Process and Completed Works**

The following discussion of my studio processes and subsequent completed works has been divided into categories that emphasize significant structural elements present in my work. This organisational device is a realisation I made in reflecting on my practice. The categories used in this section are ‘Compartments’, ‘Cocoons and Pods’, ‘Soft Sculpture’ and ‘Embroidery’. These categories are not a chronological presentation of the work.

#### **Compartments**

The works discussed in ‘Compartments’ speak to ideas of categorisation, collecting and compartmentalising. They incorporate found objects and made components that reference pharmacopeia drawers. The organisation of found and made objects transforms these pieces into personal museums and curiosity cabinets. Concepts of value and preciousness come into play in these works through the presence of soft liners that protect the contents of the compartments. Each work can be read as symbolising an organism that is composed of a number of smaller cell-like segments. Similarly, Louise Bourgeois’ *Cells* stand as individual installations but together tell the story of a greater narrative (Bernadac 1996:128). This idea of smaller components creating a larger whole is also seen in the later work, *Tear and Repair*.

**Title:** *Concept-Material-Process* and *Domestic Science*

**Dates:** May 2015; March 2016

**Media:** Found printers tray, fabric, embroidery, porcelain, latex, felt, found organic objects; Found printers tray, porcelain, felt

**Dimensions:** 6 x 53 x 43 cm; 4,3 x 35,5 x 26 cm



**Figure 10.** *Concept-Material-Process* in progress.



**Figure 11.** *Concept-Material-Process* as presented at the Staff and Students Works in Progress exhibition at the Jack Heath Gallery in May 2015.



**Figure 12.** Porcelain cocoons for *Domestic Science* in progress.

*Concept-Material-Process* and *Domestic Science* are both assemblages of small items and artworks I placed inside found printers trays. *Concept-Material-Process* is an early piece of my practice that assisted in bringing clarity to my investigation. It came together unintentionally as I tidied my studio one day; I placed pieces of my accumulated work into the tray's compartments and noticed how it began to take on the appearance of a pharmacopeia drawer (Figure 10). To these contents I added watercolour drawings, printouts of photos, ceramics tools and embroidery thread. The tray became a reflection of the studio process and represented the concepts of my practice as well as the media and processes used. The piece was titled *Concept-Material-Process*, drawing on the childhood categorisation game 'Animal, Vegetable, Mineral'.

It was shown at the CVA Staff and Students *Works in Progress* exhibition as a revelation of 'behind-the-scenes' of my practice (Figure 11). This display becomes a play between the privacy of the art studio and the public nature of the art gallery. Bringing together many media, this work is a key point in my research to explore the intersections of concepts, media and processes and understand how textiles, embroidery and porcelain can be combined in practice.

*Domestic Science* is a later piece that similarly responds to themes of containment and collection. The small cocoon-shaped sculptures in each compartment are glazed, high-fired porcelain. Each 'cocoon' has the texture of crocheted doilies imprinted into the porcelain



surface, furthering the exploration of combining two seemingly incongruous media (Figure 12).

Both of these printers trays were kept in the childhood bedroom I shared with my sister and we displayed inherited ornaments and garden curiosities in them. As ‘domesticated’ pharmacopeia drawers, the printers trays evoke memories of the past, childhood and the home. This adaption and reference to the categorisation of collections in museums opposes values of the domestic and scientific, home and museum, emotional and rational, private and public. In both trays the compartments are lined with handmade felt and references the way jewellery boxes and cutlery boxes are often lined with a protective fabric, also denoting a sense of value.

**Title:** *The Bride’s Protector*

**Dates:** February 2016- July 2016

**Media:** Found wooden jewellery box, ink, fabric, felt, porcelain, embroidery, beads

**Dimensions:** 31 x 27,3 x 27 cm



**Figure 13.** Painting and engraving on jewellery box in progress.

I purchased the wooden jewellery box used in this piece from a charity shop, with the lid detached and a drawer missing. The compartments are similar to the divisions of printers trays. The internal spaces within the exterior structure reference the home, with particular connection to Janice Lester’s *Personal Space* and Faith Wilding’s *Womb Room*.



**Figure 14.** Jewellery box with muslin and felt liners inserted.

I stained the lid and main body of the box using drawing inks: some areas were simply darkened while others were left with a shiny film where thick ink pooled. Over the ink stains I engraved lines and marks onto the wooden surface (Figure 13), taking reference from my interpretations of medical photography.

I lined the top compartments with muslin inserts and the drawers with thin handmade felt padding (Figure 14). I found the bright mustard yellow of the original velvet lining quite off-putting; however I allowed



**Figure 15.** Beadwork on handmade felt.



**Figure 16.** Beadwork and embroidery on satin.



**Figure 17.** Beadwork, embroidery, porcelain shard on velvet and satin ribbon.



**Figure 18.** Beadwork and embroidery on bra.

parts of it to show through the muslin and felt as a memory of the box's earlier existence. There is a tension between the unpleasant industrial yellow velvet and the attempt to soften and beautify the interior.

The first pieces I made for the box feature beadwork (Figures 15- 17) and were influenced by an earlier experiment with clustered beadwork on an old bra (Figure 18). I opted to play to the original function of the jewellery box by creating trinket-like pieces that appear to be richly encrusted with jewels. However, the jewellery kept in this box has a darker side as it transforms into wounds and scars.

In Figure 15 white seed beads on handmade felt become a pearl brooch or pendant. Despite the contrast between the hard plastic of the beads and the softness of the felt, the beads sink into the beige-white of the felt. This shimmery silver layer reminds me of faded stretch marks and scars on skin that have healed a different colour and texture to the skin surface. The grouping of the beads also reflects the appearance of small insect eggs laid in a cluster.

The piece in Figure 16 is a cluster of 'rubies'. The chunky beadwork forms a 3D dome-shape and is surrounded by embroidery in thin gold thread. The 'ruby' jewellery lies on a soft supportive piece of satin. This jewel transforms into a red, swollen sore or scab on the surface of sick skin.

The 'pendant' in Figure 17 shows an incorporation of porcelain with textiles and embroidery. A porcelain shard from studio tests is sewn into red velvet as a decorative 'stone'. The shard is surrounded with sinewy strings of red beads. A satin ribbon has chain-stitch worked into it with



**Figure 19.** Beadwork on porcelain slip-cast doily.



**Figure 20.** Porcelain shard and embroidery on handmade felt.



**Figure 21.** Porcelain shard and embroidery on satin.



**Figure 22.** Porcelain shard, beadwork and embroidery on handmade felt.

gold metallic thread, becoming the chain of the ‘necklace’. The shard appears to be pushing into the red velvet, causing the red inflammation of beads to swell up around it. This piece led me to create the next set of pieces that further incorporate porcelain shards into embroidered textile pieces.

A shard of a porcelain slip-cast doily from the tea trolley is used as the base of this piece and is embellished with strings of beads (Figure 19). The throwaway shard is kept carefully in the jewellery box as something personal and precious. There are cracks in the porcelain and pieces of it easily crumble off; the beads are woven through the holes in the doily pattern and act as stitches that attempt to hold the broken piece together and beautify it.

Inspired by the technique of Indian shisha mirror embroidery, the pieces in Figures 20, 21 and 22 feature porcelain shards attached to felt and fabric with thread. The works in Figure 20 and Figure 21 are stitched on simply and surrounded with embroidery stitches executed in metallic thread; this references the metal filigree seen in jewellery. In Figure 22 the piece is composed of two layers of felt. The porcelain shard is anchored to the bottom layer. The upper layer has a window cut into it that allows the porcelain and anchoring stitches to show through, creating a reliquary-like ‘pendant’.

Through my conceptual and practical studio investigation I have come to associate the breaks and cracks in porcelain with the abused and traumatized body and mind, and the brokenness of the spirit that follows abuse. As my themes focus not only on abuse but also the catharsis and healing that takes place afterwards, I thought repeatedly about my own healing process and how I reassembled my ‘shards’ into

something stronger: ‘You broke me into a million pieces and I turned them into armour against you’. The shard jewellery symbolically reveals the damage caused by the abuse and yet at the same time the victim can use it as weapons. The sharp edges and angles of the broken porcelain become knife-like; this is also present in the larger compartment of the jewellery box.



**Figure 23.** Porcelain ‘pearl’ necklace, porcelain shard with moth meconium, beaded felt, moth wings and butterfly.

In the larger top compartment a number of items have been placed together (Figure 23). The string of pearls is made with porcelain beads. The pearl necklace is a classic, ‘traditional’ piece of jewellery that has connotations of femininity and being lady-like; it also alludes to the sexual act referred to as a ‘pearl necklace’ (Online Slang Dictionary 2010).

After I had strung the porcelain beads together I tried the necklace on to experience it as a piece of jewellery. The weight and coldness of it was very uncomfortable and almost strangling. The porcelain version of the necklace becomes a metaphorical burden of femininity for women to bear. The positioning of this weight around the neck additionally draws comparisons with a noose; in turn, this raises the issue of the high rate of intimate partner violence committed against women in many countries (World Health Organization 2016).

The yellow-brown liquid stain on the porcelain is moth meconium. A moth emerged from its cocoon one night in my studio and through its emergence process ejected meconium (see Chapter One, *Situating Concepts*) on my desk and window-sill, as well as some of my porcelain test pieces. The meconium on the porcelain is an actual, physical reference for my themes of metamorphosis and catharsis and stain imagery and being able to include it in this piece is incredibly significant. It stands as a symbol for transformation and release of built-up trauma. The butterfly and moth wings further emphasize this and signify the possibility of flight and escape.

As with the drawers I lined the ring-holder section with handmade felt (Figure 24). I fitted more porcelain shards into the spaces: some broken test pieces, a broken hexagon from the quilt and a piece of slip-cast doily. The way the shards jut out from between the soft



**Figure 24.** Porcelain shards and handmade felt, in ring-holder.

sections of the ring-holder alludes to the way women often carry keys between their fingers as make-shift weapons while walking alone or at night (G. Calder pers. comm. August 2016).

*The Bride's Protector* alludes to issues of domestic violence and abuse. The beautification and disguising of the physical and emotional wounds as jewellery and precious stones reflects on the condition of society covering up and ignoring the truth about domestic abuse and gender-based violence. By

hiding the jewellery from view I comment on the social

attitude that abuse that occurs within the home and between intimate partners should remain hidden and dealt with privately. At the same time the wounds and scars are worn publicly as jewellery, suggesting a secret encoded message to try express what is happening behind the facade. In this work the medium of porcelain could represent an oppressive patriarchal power over women, referencing the history of porcelain as a colonial dominance (Cooper 2000, Erickson 2015) and ceramics in general as a domain controlled by men (Buckley 1990).

The fabrics used in the creation of the jewellery pieces are scraps from other larger projects. This connects with the reality of women prioritizing their family and the home through their crafts and using the leftover pieces to make work that satisfies them creatively and emotionally (Osaki 1988, Parker 2010). As this piece also discusses the hope of escape and flight from the abuse, the embroidery work feeds significantly into the themes of catharsis and healing; it becomes a physical embodiment of these emotional processes that happen during recovery.

**Title:** *Consume*

**Dates:** June 2015- July 2016

**Media:** Porcelain, found wooden tea trolley, found crocheted doilies, collected specimens

**Dimensions:** 75 x 43,5 x 67,5 cm

*Consume* combines textiles and porcelain as an integrated material, presenting a domestic museum of gendered ornamentation. I purchased a tea trolley (Figure 25) from a second-hand goods shop because this particular style of furniture and other found objects selected for my exhibition exist in an area of tension for me. These objects remind me of my family- parents, grandparents, great-grandparents- and there is a presence of sentimentality. Growing up, this furniture was always present in family homes and it embodies memory, heritage and home, adding to their value and preciousness. On the other hand, they can symbolise a patriarchal power and a possible reading that references a European, colonial rule.

Likewise, the doily, which is used extensively in *Consume*, holds a personal significance for me. My great-gran turned her hand to many textiles crafts and I clearly remember a set of doilies that she made for my family's lounge. Homemade doilies held a place in many households and were a common sight in the homes of older South Africans. Today they are not so widely made and used in the same way but are available as hand-me-downs and at charity stores, becoming a recycled symbol of home and comfort.



**Figure 25.** Tea trolley with porcelain boxes and objects from studio.

The tea trolley is simultaneously masculine and feminine. The medium and wood-working skills employed to build it connote masculinity while the slight flourish in the design and the function of the trolley (domestic, serving tea and cakes) imply femininity. I compare this trolley to my family's dining room table, which has been used by our family for generations. Knowing that my family has a patriarchal history I imagine how women would have been expected to be subservient to their husbands while serving them and their children at the table. Our table is square with straight lines and austere design elements. It has the addition of clips used to hold a tablecloth in place, taking into account the 'feminine' decorative and protective element that will be laid over it. This 'laying over'

and ‘layering’ of ‘*theoretical objects*’ (Bal 2001) played a significant role in my transformation of the tea trolley.

In its domestic function the top level of the trolley would be decorated and laid out with a tea set while the bottom would hold additional tea-drinking supplies. The tea trolley symbolizes ritual and coming together. Tea-drinking rituals exist strongly in my family, becoming a way of acknowledging each other’s needs, communicating and sharing emotional excitements and traumas. *Consume* speaks of these family connections and the attempt at creating comfort in the home.



**Figure 26.** Tea trolley with porcelain boxes, wooden drawers and natural found objects.



**Figure 27.** Unit trays in entymology department of KZN Museum. Photo: Jessica Steytler.



**Figure 28.** Textile, ceramic and organic found objects in porcelain boxes.

In June 2015 I made a series of porcelain boxes that reference unit trays (Figure 26 and 27) of museum specimen collections. I arranged the porcelain boxes and the drawers from the jewellery box on the top layer of the tea trolley as I was tidying up in my studio. At this point I realised the potential of an assemblage and I placed a doily beneath the boxes and arranged natural found objects inside them (Figure 26). This arrangement is intended to reference pharmacopoeia drawers of natural science research and the printers trays of home decoration. On the lower level I placed a porcelain cocoon sculpture and a large coral specimen, both on doilies (Figure 25). The tea trolley, with its offering of collected natural curiosities, becomes a mobile, domestic museum.

I experimented further with the porcelain boxes on the trolley and the combinations of objects they contained. I placed a range of found natural objects, such as nests and dead spiders, and ceramic and textile pieces into the boxes. I photographed this visual play and experimentation to record the evolution of this piece (Figure 28).

The final state of *Consume* incorporates extensive combinations of my key media. Using various doilies purchased from a Hospice shop I made slip-cast porcelain doily inserts for several of the boxes (Figure 29). Additionally I used segments of doilies dipped in



**Figure 29.** Porcelain slip-cast doily in box.

porcelain slip to stamp onto the sides of some of the boxes (Figure 30). This left behind a faint reproduction of the pattern and texture of the doilies, referencing the preservation of memory. This interplay between textiles and porcelain is a significant contribution to my investigation into combining media.



**Figure 30.** Doily print in porcelain slip on side of box.

The doilies become porcelain and in turn the porcelain becomes the doilies. The porcelain adds to the perceived delicacy of the doilies, creating fragile web-like structures that curl and fold over the straight edges of the boxes. The shrinking and warping of the porcelain during the firing creates interesting results. Some of the doilies distort and shrink significantly, taking on a dried and shriveled appearance echoing the appearance of many of the specimens in the boxes. While the crocheted doilies burn away in the firing the porcelain forever preserves them and the gendered history they embody.

Through this preservation, however, the doilies lose the warmth and comfort that they would have offered to a home, taking on the coldness of the porcelain. This feeling is familiar when visiting museum collections of domestic artefacts. Articles preserved behind glass may be capable of lasting many years longer but the removal of their functionality essentially removes their essence as domestic objects created for the home. There is a strong connection between the porcelain of *Consume* and the development of porcelain for tea sets and caddies (Cooper 2000:161).

I fitted some boxes with soft felt liners, which symbolise the protective nature of seedpods and cocoons and refer to how carefully collected specimens are stored in museums.

Beneath the boxes is a layer of large doilies in their original, textile form (Figure 31). Originally one large doily was used on the surface; the effect is amplified using several doilies that are layered over each other on the trolley. The whiteness of the doilies over the dark wood creates a strong contrast, enhancing the negative shapes within the doily patterns as well as emphasising the positive shapes. The excessive decoration with the





**Figure 31.** Arrangement of doilies on tea trolley.

doilies is an attempt to overwhelm the presence of the tea trolley itself, as an application of ‘feminine’ decoration over ‘masculine’ design. It softens the patriarchal power, giving over to a ‘maternal’ presence. I referenced the decorative style of homes I remember from my childhood, where emphasis was placed on handmade items that double as functional and ornamental, such as doilies and armchair protectors. The act of decorating is seen as a psychological process of creating comfort and security, providing the occupants relief and protection from the outside world (I. Calder 2016, pers. comm), while also creating a façade of

perfection. *Consume* displays elements of this style through the extensive use of both textile and porcelain doilies and the layers symbolically cover up the presence of abuse and unhappiness in the home.



**Figure 32.** Lower level of tea trolley with doily, slip-cast egg trays, insects and nests.

I decorated the bottom level of the tea trolley with a single doily designed to fit on a coffee table (Figure 32). A full size porcelain slip-cast egg tray is placed on this and alongside it are smaller pieces of porcelain egg trays. Within the sections of the egg trays is the overflow from the collection presented above. The egg trays point to the existence of the home’s kitchen, typically a feminine domain. The porcelain egg trays also became dry and desiccated like the insects they contain and can barely hold together. The original function to protect eggs is erased by the ceramic transformation.

The specimens in the boxes have been included for their conceptual weight. The moth is the anchor of my themes. It represents metamorphosis, safety, catharsis, healing and escape from abuse. The beetles are a reminder that potential for flight and escape can be hidden while strong armour can protect. The geckos are a symbol for catharsis as they shed their old skins as they grow. The egg and snail shells, pupal casing and nests represent birth, life, protection, comfort, development and process, and connect to womb imagery. The wasp nests with all its chambers reflects on the idea of the cell and space within a space, and anticipates the structure of the future work, *Tear and Repair*.

Through my readings I have found that porcelain's colonial history could reinforce the reading of European colonial symbolism of the curiosity cabinet. In the combination of the porcelain and textile media I am aware of the historical backgrounds and potential symbolic readings that viewers could make. These porcelain slip-cast doilies could express ideas of the expectations and restrictions of femininity. The collision of the two media and material binaries results in the cracking and crumbling of divisions. *Consume* and *The Dinner Party* hold similarities in their combining of porcelain and textiles to present a scene of social gathering that addresses issues of gender. One can imagine the women coming together and discussing their individual and shared experiences over a cup of tea.

### **Cocoons and Pods**

This series of porcelain 'cocoons' explores the metaphorical connections between the material qualities and processes of porcelain, moth metamorphosis and human trauma and healing. The delicacy, fineness, translucency, whiteness and purity (Lane 1995:7) of porcelain become focal points. This was the first time I had worked with porcelain, and through my experiments I came to learn that the medium offered me new avenues that I had not experienced with other clays. The forms of moth cocoons, seedpods and uteri inspired the structures of these pieces, and each of these organic 'containers' provides inward and outward protection for delicate contents. There are symbolic connections between the uterus and cocoon. The globular form is a protective, life-supporting casing for the developing fetus, separating it from other internal organs while supplying nutrients and oxygen through the enclosing membrane. The fetus is surrounded by amniotic fluid, which protects and cushions it during development.

Porcelain paperclay is created by adding cellulose to the porcelain clay and is used in works that require it to have heightened strength during the working and drying stages and lighter weight after firing. For these reasons I used it for the cocoon series, which is grouped under the collective title *Incubation*.

**Title:** *Incubation*

**Dates:** August 2014- March 2016

**Media:** High-fired porcelain, found cabinet

**Dimensions:** 85 x 69 x 116 cm



**Figure 33.** Porcelain slab with stretched, folded and cracked texture.



**Figure 34.** Porcelain with stretched and torn texture, with red iron oxide wash.



**Figure 35.** Porcelain slip trailing creating cluster of droplets.

The early stages of *Incubation* began with experimentation with porcelain to understand how the physical qualities of the plastic material could draw connections with skin (Bagley 2010) that appears torn, bruised and damaged. To achieve these results I ‘abused’ and handled the porcelain roughly by stretching, crumpling and shaking it out repeatedly. The elasticity of the wet porcelain allows for interesting textures to occur in response to these actions (Figure 33).

I used different objects and tools to manipulate the surface texture. In some tests red iron oxide was mixed with water to create a wash and painted onto the surface, creating an inflamed and bruised appearance on the porcelain, which is made permanent through firing (Figure 34).

When droplets of porcelain slip were clustered together they created the appearance of acne or the erratic growth of cancer cells (Figure 35). As the slip dried I applied red iron oxide wash which flowed and bled through areas of the slip, emphasizing the distressed state of the porcelain skin.

Having gained an understanding of the physical materiality of porcelain I embarked on the making of the cocoons. *Incubation* was largely unplanned. There was never an intended



**Figure 36.** Cocoon 1.

size for the series and the development unfolded along the course of the research project.

The first porcelain cocoons (Figures 36 and 37) were not entirely successful in terms of my structural and conceptual aims. They collapsed in the higher firing and lost their



**Figure 37.** Cocoon 2.

cocoon-like qualities. I left the surfaces unglazed and the pure glassiness and unbroken white of the porcelain resulted in pieces that are cold and hard. The torn edges of the porcelain become sharp and blade-like after the final firing. The sense of sharp sterility could be translated as a dysfunctional uterus or cocoon. These pieces led me to develop a building and firing method that would support the cocoons through the stages of creation.

### The Building Process



**Figure 38.** Muslin bag of vermiculite on sculpture stand.

I created an armature by arranging vermiculite-filled stockings inside a muslin bag and suspending it from a sculpture stand (Figure 38). The armature was the support around which the porcelain form was built and determined the shape of the porcelain cocoon.



**Figure 39.** Porcelain paperclay slabs joined on armature.

I rolled the clay into thin slabs and manipulated it to create surface texture. I gradually applied the slabs in 'rings' around the circumference of the armature (Figure 39). As each 'ring' of slabs was applied I allowed the clay to firm up slightly to ensure that the weight of the next application did not cause the previous layer to tear right off. Due to the gravity of this building technique the wet clay became unstable and needed patience and support in order to grow. The repetition in the application of the clay reflects on the cathartic repetition seen in later sewn and embroidered works.



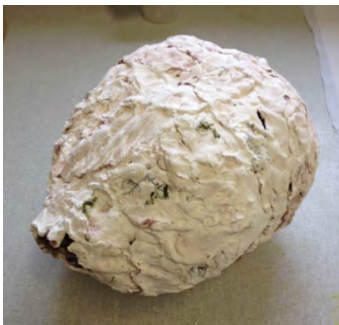
**Figure 40.** Nylon stockings tied over cocoon to support damp slabs.

The physical qualities of the clay played a role in the decisions I made during the building process. While I did allow some tearing to occur I also developed techniques to ensure structural integrity. Once the porcelain construction was complete I stretched and tied nylon stockings around the sculpture. These acted as bandages that supported the damp clay and prevented excessive tearing. The damp cocoon was left tied up overnight to dry sufficiently that it will hold its form (Figure 40).



**Figure 41.** Dry cocoon removed from sculpture stand and emptied of vermiculite.

I then untied the cocoon from the stand and removed the vermiculite and muslin bag from the interior. The cocoon was left to dry fully over a few days (Figure 41) before bisque firing in order to irreversibly transform the clay into a ceramic body (Figure 42)



**Figure 42.** Bisque-fired cocoon.

After the bisque firing parts of the cocoon were glazed and it was fired a second time in a higher firing to temperatures between 1220°C and 1260°C (the chosen maximum temperature varied between individual pieces). Some of the cocoons were fired to the maximum temperature without being glazed (Figure 43). These temperatures are necessary for the porcelain body to vitrify and glazes to flux.



**Figure 43.** Porcelain paperclay cocoon fired to 1220°C.

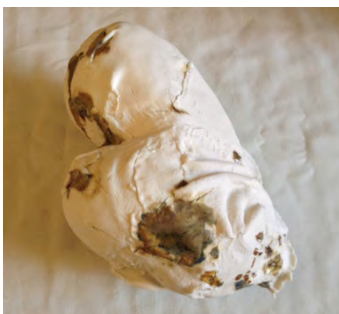
As mentioned, the first porcelain cocoons slumped during the higher firing. To prevent this complete loss of form the later cocoons were supported by being placed inside a saggar (an unglazed fired ceramic bowl) with alumina hydrate packed beneath and around it.

As the series progressed I came to realize that the process of creating each cocoon is a physical embodiment of the concept of metamorphosis and catharsis. Each porcelain cocoon underwent its own metamorphic process: growing wet clay/skin; dry clay/skin; bisque firing; glazing; higher firing; completion. The cellulose within the porcelain paperclay, and any other materials applied to the outer skin of the cocoon as surface treatments, burn away and react in the firings remaining as ash on a kiln shelf or fume marks on the porcelain body as a reminder of this ceramic cathartic process. The firings of the cocoons represent symbolic cathartic release and they emerged changed through this metamorphosis, also connecting metaphorically with the transformations in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Ovid 1986).



**Figure 44.** Cocoon 3.

I selectively glazed Cocoons 3 and 4 (Figures 44 and 45) with thick patches of glaze that became scab-like layers that sit on the porcelain 'skin'.



**Figure 45.** Cocoon 4.

I strengthened the conceptual connection between the series of cocoons and protective structures by incorporating greater use of glazes and oxides. During the construction of cocoons 5, 6 and 7 (Figures 46, 47 and 48) I painted the clay slabs on one side with washes of red iron oxide which became the interiors of the cocoons. Once fired these interiors were left with a darkened red-brown finish with some areas of the white porcelain showing through (Figure 48). The red-brown breaks the sterility of the porcelain and creates a more organic feeling. The oxide dirtied some of the exterior surface as well, further moving the porcelain away from the idea of purity. There is a tension in contaminating the porcelain surface, as the clay is typically kept away from any colouring oxides to prevent discolouration and preserve its whiteness.



**Figure 46.** Cocoon 5.

Cocoons 5 and 6 each encase small, egg-like porcelain forms (Figure 48). The openings of the cocoons are too small for the eggs to pass through, suggesting that they grew within the cocoon. This reinforces the protective qualities of the cocoons. I have deliberately



**Figure 47.** Cocoon 6.



**Figure 48.** Interior of Cocoon 6 with porcelain 'egg'.



**Figure 49.** Cocoon 7.

added elements to many of my works that require careful viewing for all the details to be noticed, much like the doily prints on the tea trolley boxes.

Cocoon 7 (Figure 49) became the final piece of the series. I intentionally allowed the wet clay to tear and crack to highlight its material nature. I texturised the outer clay 'skin' with stamped impressions of old crocheted doilies, and patches of glaze created a mottled effect. In its torn open state this final cocoon has released life, a metamorphosed moth or fully formed baby, into the world. All that remains is this protective, porcelain casing that allowed for healing, growth and transformation to take place. It is an old, yet once necessary, skin that has now been sloughed off.

There is a close connection between the iconography of this series and that seen in Louise Bourgeois's practice that metaphorically interprets the cell (Bernadac 1996, Bal 2001).

The seemingly contradictory qualities of porcelain as strong and fragile (Lane 1995, Frisinger 2012) contribute to the ambiguity of the cell metaphor where the cell can be a sign of health and growth as well as a potential site for illness and death (Bernadac 1996, Bal 2001). The use of the uterus as an iconographic image leads the viewer to interpret this work as one that discusses trauma, catharsis and healing in particular relation to how women experience them. The central-core imagery provides a feminist context for the work, as does the use of porcelain and later introduction of textiles (Jones 1996).

In these works I have alluded to the combination of my key media, although *Incubation* did not evolve into a natural union of textiles and porcelain. I later made a felt cocoon form that incorporated undyed fleece as the exterior and red dyed fleece internally. As I felted the soft sculpture the red dye ran and fixed to areas of the undyed fleece, and reflected on the appearance of the porcelain cocoons in terms of form and colour.

## Soft Sculpture

The works in this category explore the potential of fabric as a 3D sculpture medium. During my first experiments with soft sculpture I felt very ambivalent towards it as a valid expression of ‘fine art’ as I connected my media of fabric and stuffing with cushions and children’s toys. This led me to research concepts of art/craft debates (discussed in Chapter One) as a framework to better understand the position of my practice. As a medium the fabric implies femininity through the association of textile crafts with women. As I reflected further on the works it struck me that my media and processes were drawing on dress-making and sewing skills that I was exposed to and learnt from a young age. This reinforced the symbolism of textile crafts as a special connection between generations of women. The process of bringing pieces of fabric together with sutures of thread reflects on the metaphor of sewing as a repairing, healing act, as in Louise Bourgeois’ textile works (Cheim Read 2011). In all of the soft sculpture works the repetition of the processes became significant. The handsewing of *Pupa* and *The Bride* and the making and bringing together of many small components in *Tear and Repair* was slow and laborious and required focus and patience, connecting with my themes of catharsis and healing.

**Title:** *Pupa*

**Date:** June 2015

**Media:** Fabric scraps, synthetic stuffing

**Dimensions:** 9 x 17,5 x 8,5 cm



**Figure 50.** *Pupa* in progress.

*Pupa* was my first experiment with soft sculpture and is made with assorted fabric scraps sold for patchwork. The outer fabric was hand-sewn in bands around the base form, referencing the segments of insect bodies (Figure 50). I selected the fabrics for their shades of pink and luxurious textures, and I intentionally alternated the sections to create a contrast between the matte, shiny and glossy fabrics. The cocoon-like form of this soft sculpture was created to be slightly ambiguous and it alludes to a pupa or internal organ. The pinkness of the fabric is significant as it implies femininity; additionally pink conjures up connotations of softness, the domestic and the internal cavities of the body.



*Pupa* became a key work in the progress of my research. I made significant discoveries during the making process as tension arose in my ability to accept this piece as ‘art’ when I began drawing comparisons between it and toys. This work led me to create the next soft sculpture, *The Bride*.

**Title:** *The Bride*

**Date:** July- August 2015

**Media:** Fabric, porcelain, synthetic stuffing, glass

**Dimensions:** 20 x 20 x 14 cm



**Figure 51.** Porcelain teeth with red iron oxide wash, unfired.



**Figure 52.** Dermoid cyst with tooth and hair in human ovary. UCL Pathology Collections. Photo: Gemma Angel. Available at: <https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/researchers-in-museums/2013/03/04/pulling-teeth-ovarian-teratomas-vagina-dentata/> [Accessed: 10 August 2016].

An objective of the studio process has been to explore ways in which porcelain and textiles can be combined in coherent works and *The Bride* plays a key role in this investigation. *The Bride* references vagina dentata myths and I began by making a ‘set’ of sculpted porcelain teeth (Figure 51). Although I observed cows teeth as a reference, the porcelain teeth are not realistic and are made quite roughly with exaggerated texture, implying a deformity in their growth. I emphasised the texture in the porcelain with a wash of red iron oxide and sculpted a small ‘cap’ at the end of each tooth to anchor it into the fabric sculpture.

Vagina dentata are dermoid cysts (Figure 52), which grow from stem cells and have the potential to develop into many different types of tissue, including teeth and hair. These cysts can grow in most parts of the human body (Angel 2013). My academic background in Classical Studies has provided me with some knowledge on vagina dentata myths. Many cultures have addressed the anomaly of vagina dentata through stories that provide warnings of the ‘toothy’ vagina that can devour men’s genitalia, and tell of removing vagina dentata to transform women into benign partners for marriage (Angel 2013). These myths were created to warn against premarital and extramarital sex with women, or warn against the dangers

of sex with women. The penis is damaged or removed by the aggressive toothed vagina; symbolically the male and his masculinity are compromised. I feel that this could also be reinterpreted from a feminist angle, vagina dentata become a vaginal defense mechanism against violent and unwanted sexual invasion of the body.



**Figure 53.** *The Bride* in progress with porcelain teeth sewn in place.

I used soft, white fabric to construct the cocoon-like form, which served as the outer casing for the sculpture. Each porcelain tooth was inserted through a small slit in the fabric and stitched in place (Figure 53). Through this gathering and sewing the fabric responded by forming skin-like folds and creases.

I then decorated the toothy casing with white lace, like a bride. I used dressmaking techniques to attach and manipulate the positioning of the lace (Figure 54).



**Figure 54.** Fabric base form covered in lace with porcelain teeth 'growing' through.

I folded and gathered salmon pink chiffon into pleats that allude to the vulva and labia (Figure 55). Almost like a veil the lacy covering conceals a direct representation of the vulva or vagina; in turn the pink chiffon folds become more like a decorative edging to a nightgown or other delicate garment.

Femininity and the feminine are implied without blatantly reducing a discussion of female experience down to a 'genital-centred' experience. On completion of the work I noticed that the length and positioning of some of the teeth create a limb-like appearance, potentially implying an ability of movement possessed by this sculpture.



**Figure 55.** Detail of folds and pink chiffon insert.

I considered how displaying the sculpture on a stand would support it and potentially enhance the power of the piece. I tried using various shards of porcelain from my studio as a base (Figure 56), however these proved to be unsatisfactory.



**Figure 56.** Experimenting with potential display stands for *The Bride*.

I acquired two damaged glass flasks which had been discarded by the science laboratories. I slumped them in a kiln inside saggars containing alumina hydrate and pieces of kiln blanket for support (Figure 57). The flasks caved in on themselves, creating bowl-like forms. The final stand was composed of one slumped glass flask and a glass stopper from an old jar (Figure 58).



**Figure 57.** Slumped glass flasks.

There are a number of potential readings of *The Bride*. Ironically the science flask in its transformed state now, to me, resembled a glass sundae bowl. Displayed on the glass stand, the decorative, pretty bride becomes like a dessert covered in rich toppings. This excessive, almost delicious appearance of *The Bride* relates to metaphorical ideas of consumption, of both women and concepts of femininity.



**Figure 58.** Final glass stand composed of slumped flask and glass stopper.

The choice of fabrics used in this sculpture determined the title I gave it, and alludes to the connections with marriage rituals. Again, my background in Classical Studies has shown me the connection between Ancient Greek sacrificial rituals and wedding rituals. The use of white clothing and veils in typical female wedding attire may have originated from rituals in which initiates and human and animal sacrifices were marked with white paint or clothing and had their vision

obscured through blindfolding or the darkening of the ritual location. The sacrifice would be led to an altar, physically sacrificed and consumed by those allowed to do so. Likewise, a bride is dressed in white, has her face slightly obscured with a veil of semi-translucent fabric and is led down an aisle to an altar where her ownership is transferred. Her girlhood is sacrificed, she is initiated into marriage, and is metaphorically consumed by her husband. The partnerships of Ancient Greek marriages were not nearly as equal as marriages are expected to be in modern day society. However, I reference this link in discussing the issue that some women do experience unhealthy relationships and marriages. *The Bride's* toothy body is ready and prepared to fight back, and links to the next soft sculpture, *Tear and Repair*.

**Title:** *Tear and Repair*

**Dates:** November 2015- August 2016

**Media:** fabric, felt, porcelain, found hospital bed, metal legs

**Dimensions:** 72 x 92 x 209 cm

*Tear and Repair* was inspired by SEM (scanning electron microscope) images of blood cells and viruses. The original idea was to incorporate dozens of small sewn and stuffed 'red blood cells' held together by webs of thread 'blood clots' with porcelain 'leukocytes' (white blood cells) in between them. This composition of fabric and porcelain blood matter would either lie on a bed or mattress or become the mattress itself. *Tear and Repair* evolved considerably over the course of its creation in response to practical and conceptual issues.



**Figure 59.** Completed sample of red blood cells showing variation in texture and tone.

Early stages of construction began with the sewing of red blood cells. I used different types of fabrics including polycotton, netting, velvet and stretch knit to create a sense of depth and movement within the mass of forms, and to play with ways light would react with the varying surfaces (Figure 59).



**Figure 60.** Start of thread blood clots holding cells together.

I tangled and clumped red polycotton sewing thread to create 'blood clots' that bundle the red blood cells together (Figure 60). This material decision was based on observing SEM photographs of clotting blood and I immediately made the connection between the sticky strands of the blood clots and tangled thread. I wanted to create an imbalance by presenting work that displays both the grasp of good sewing technique and the intentional sabotage of it. This disturbance created by the tangled thread could potentially influence the overall mood and interpretation of the piece.

The repetition of the work required for this piece became an immense source of frustration. Each cell had to be marked, pinned, sewn, cut, turned, stuffed and stitched closed. It became extremely fiddly, tedious and mind numbing. The further into this

process I moved the greater I understood the unfolding nature of practice-based research leading to understanding. The process I set out on mimics the type of work believed that women were best suited to, namely repetitive, delicate, tedious, seated, with small gestures, in both textile work and factory ceramic painting (Buckley 1990, Parker 2010). *Tear and Repair* and my participation in it embody these traits. Despite these frustrations I found the collective and accumulative growth of this piece is incredibly satisfying. Furthermore there are clear connections between the process of this work and the development of organisms through the division and replication of cells. This type of process is also seen in the embroidery works (discussed later) and the future making of the hexagon quilt.



**Figure 61.** Porcelain leukocytes in progress.

The small leukocyte sculptures (Figure 61) became the first porcelain component of *Tear and Repair*. My intention was to address the combination of my media in two ways. Firstly the porcelain pieces were to lie alongside the fabric pieces as two elements that work together to act as one cohesive piece, as in *The Dinner Party*. Secondly the porcelain slabs were texturised using different doilies (Figure 62) to reference the bumpy appearance of the leukocyte surface.



**Figure 62.** Detail of doily texture on porcelain slab.

The inclusion of the doily in the making of the leukocytes connects textile crafts to cathartic, healing processes. The doily texture connects textile crafts with the leukocyte and its function as a healing cell, and emphasises the idea of textile processes as providing healing and catharsis.

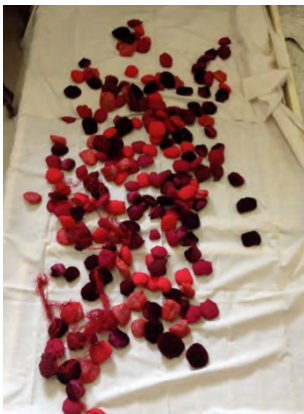


**Figure 63.** Hospital bed in studio.

I found the metal base of a hospital bed (Figure 63) which could become a base or platform for the soft sculpture of accumulated fabric blood cells. Aesthetically the metal grid of the bed reflects on the compartments of the printers trays as well as concepts of the cell.

During critiques and studio discussions several issues pertaining to the hospital bed as a sculptural piece were raised. I was made aware of how the bed's origins make it quite a

powerful object. The hospital as a location and functioning space carries an extreme amount of tension- it is both clean and dirty, supporting life and disposing of death. A concern was expressed that the symbolic strength of the hospital bed itself might overwhelm the soft sculpture it supports and take centre stage. Many of my studio colleagues felt there was potential for the bed to be carrying ‘energies’ absorbed from patients that used it; it could have held a dying patient or witnessed birth and survival. In this case there is far more potency than just the symbolism of the bed.



**Figure 64.** Review arrangement of clotted red blood cells on hospital bed with sheet.

I reviewed *Tear and Repair* by placing a large sheet of fabric on the hospital bed and roughly arranging the red blood cells over this (Figure 64). An earlier review of the blood cells directly on the grid of the bed brought to my attention that something needed to be placed between the bed and the blood cells. The sheet assists in emphasizing the blood cells; however the solid fabric obliterates the interesting grid of the base. A balance between the support of the sheet and the visibility of the bed needed to be found. It was during this review that I decided to remove the porcelain leukocytes from the sculpture, as the components did not read successfully in combination.



**Figure 65.** Sinewy strands within felt.

I decided to make a felt hexagon quilt that would act as an anchor between the bed and the red blood cells.

Large pieces of handmade felt that incorporated layers of woven fabric scraps and red dyed fleece were made and then cut into individual hexagons. As the felted matted together during the felting process some parts of the red fleece clumped into sinew-like strands, creating a visceral feeling within the felt (Figure 65). The quilt slowly grew over time, hexagon by hexagon, row by row, section by section. Like the large mass of small, accumulated red blood cells, the quilt is a large organism constructed of small, cell-like units (Figure 66). The meanings of making blankets and quilts connect with



**Figure 66.** Progressive growth of quilt.

comfort, warmth and home, and through my readings I found some historical connections. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century pioneer women in North America recycled industrially made clothing brought from Europe in handmade patchwork quilts (Lucie-Smith 1981:202-203); similarly during the Second Anglo-Boer War of 1899 to 1902, Voortrekker women incarcerated in British concentration camps sewed fabric covers for the rough army issue blankets they were provided (Alkema 2009:18).



**Figure 67.** Complete textile and porcelain hexagon quilt on hospital bed.

As with the making of the red blood cells the process of constructing the quilt was incredibly laborious and repetitive. The final quilt (Figure 67) is composed of handmade felt and incorporates muslin, batting and lace, contributing significantly to the overall visual quality of the quilt through the varying opacity and texture of the hexagons. I deliberately left spaces in the body of the quilt to allow the grid of the hospital bed to be viewed, connecting the compartment-like grid of the bed and the hexagonal compartments of the quilt. The conjoined hexagons mimic the structures of beehive honeycombs and wasp nests. In these structures the hexagons are cellular chambers that can contain. The cell is at once a singular unit that acts as building block and a structure that can both protect and entrap (Bernadac 1996).



**Figure 68.** Porcelain hexagons tied onto quilt.

As an alternative to the leukocytes I made porcelain hexagons that I texturized with crocheted doilies (Figure 68). Some have a red iron oxide wash brushed over the porcelain reflecting on the variation of colour seen in the handmade felt. The hexagons were tied onto the quilt through small holes in each corner. The porcelain hexagons were given the texture of crochet but they were also treated as if they were fabric, being sewn into the quilt. This is similar to the slip-cast doilies in *Consume*, where the boundaries of the media are blurred.

After completing the quilt I reviewed the arrangement of the red blood cells again (Figure 69). I realized that the quilt had become the focal piece of *Tear and Repair* and that the



**Figure 69.** Reviewing of red blood cells arranged over quilt.

blood cells obscured the detail and impact of it. An alternative, more appropriate way of displaying the blood cells became the next step in *Tear and Repair*'s creation.

Connected to *The Bride*, *Tear and Repair* offers a number of possible interpretations. The bed is a site of comfort, rest and security but can also be the place one receives unwanted physical contact and invasion. The hospital bed simultaneously implies sickness and healing, and can lead to both positive and negative readings of the work. Likewise, the beauty of the quilt could be read as obscuring something more sinister, which is presented by the blood cells. The single hexagon reflects on the porcelain shards of *The Bride's Protector*; these textile 'shards' in the quilt are reunited through stitch.

### **Embroidery**

Discussed here are selected key pages of the embroideries that I made over the course of this research that illustrate crucial moments and realizations in the studio investigation. During the early stages of my research I did small embroideries in my spare time and used them as a creative outlet that formed part of a recovery process. These embroideries helped me to clarify the themes and objectives of my research as I experienced the making of the embroideries as cathartic and healing; this became a significant aspect of my practice. I first referred to these works as the 'stain series' due to the iconography used and the connections to concepts of healing and the cathartic processes (see Chapter One, *Situating Concepts*).

The stain imagery of the embroideries is connected with emotional and physical catharsis and influenced by Ancient Greek medical teachings (Jouanna 1999). In 2015 of my Masters my supervisor left a still-closed chrysalis on my studio desk and over a weekend the adult moth emerged, releasing meconium onto my desk and some surrounding test pieces. Considering my major themes this occurrence was very significant and enabled me to better visualize and explain the stain imagery in my work. In all media of my practice the stain is a symbol of cathartic and transformative processes. The bodily fluids released during Ancient Greek processes of catharsis are typically looked upon with disgust; in this



context I portray the stains and marks left behind by such matter as more positive symbols of metamorphosis and physical and emotional catharsis and healing.

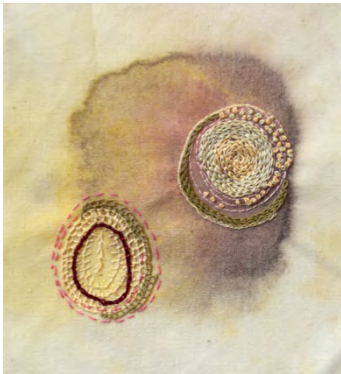
Art/craft debates arose during early considerations of how to exhibit the embroideries as 2D pieces in a gallery; later, upon reflecting on their narrative nature, I decided to bind them in a fabric book titled *Rebirth* (this will be discussed later in the section). Over the course of making the embroideries I came to realize the use of thread works in the same ways as accepted 'fine art' media by building up marks and layers to create images with aesthetic and conceptual value.

**Title:** *Rebirth*

**Dates:** October 2014- September 2016

**Media:** Fabric, felt, embroidery thread, acrylic paint, ink

**Dimensions:** 26 x 26,5 x 5 cm



**Figure 70.** Stain imagery in acrylic paint and embroidery.

The earliest embroideries were influenced by my watercolours on paper which referenced images of the human fetus developing in utero. I replicated these results of these by applying thin washes of acrylic paint on fabric. I controlled the flow and bleeding of the paint by dripping water over the fabric as well as by tilting it to determine the direction and pooling of the paint. My concept of stain iconography developed as I furthered the connection of the paint marks with leaking bodily fluids like blood. At the same time I experimented with fabric dyes; I discontinued their use as the processes required took away from the spontaneity of the work. These paint stains were then embroidered into (Figure 70); I realized that an important part of the embroideries was that they were small, the making process was uninterrupted and became a 'stream of consciousness' expression.

As the series developed into a larger project I began working more intently on them and broadening my knowledge of stitch techniques. The small piece in Figure 71 took approximately two days of almost constant work to complete. I used 'brick stitch' which incorporates straight, vertical stitches staggered like brickwork, enabling me to blend and gradate the thread colours like the watercolour and acrylic washes. This piece brought to



**Figure 71.** Embroidery on cotton.

my attention the significance of the process I was using, as the technique is incredibly precise and time consuming and requires focus and a controlled hand. The embroidery process becomes cathartic as a quiet, repetitive task and allows for emotional processing and healing. It also leads to an understanding of how embroidery was demarcated as an ideal feminine hobby (Parker 2010).



**Figure 72.** Embroidery on cotton.

In an attempt to create larger and what might be perceived as more ‘valid’ embroidery works I made the piece in Figure 72. Referencing histological photography I use layered seed stitches to build up the image. At this early stage of my research I was still grappling with accepted forms of making and displaying ‘art’ and I felt it necessary to present traditionally framed 2D works. Although this piece was not included in the final exhibition, it became key in the research process as it led me to investigate art/craft debates and interrogate how practitioners can experiment with these

tensions and use them to their advantage. Issues of exhibition and display became a central focus in my studio research process. I considered what alternatives there are to displaying work in frames on walls and on plinths, as I did not feel that these forms of display benefitted my practice. It was later that a book compiling all of the embroideries became an obvious choice.



**Figure 73.** Textural stain embroidery on calico.

As the series developed the round stain imagery grew stronger. The embroidery in Figure 73 displays significant surface texture with a great density of the stitches. During the process of this piece I focused on creating a sense of movement within the surface by using very roughly executed stitches. The result was a thick mat of thread that sits on the fabric surface like a scab or congealed blood.

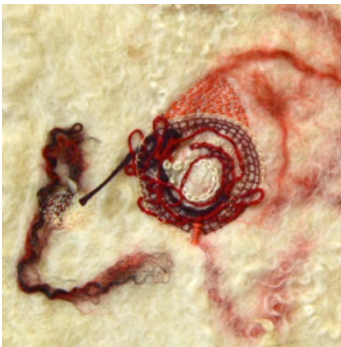
In Figure 74 I used watercolours, Mercurochrome and iodine to stain the Aida (loose weave fabric used for cross-stitch) in preparation for cross-stitch embroidery. The use of



**Figure 74.** Watercolours, mercurochrome and embroidery 'stains' with porcelain on Aida.

watercolours in this context is interesting when considering that watercolours have a 'fine art' history, typically associated with framed artwork on paper, while fabric comes from a history of 'craft' and women's work. There is a potential tension created by the combination of these media. Mercurochrome, often referred to as 'monkey blood', and iodine are antibacterials used at home to treat minor wounds; they connect with the scientific themes of my work and the concept of the stain as a symbol of catharsis and healing. The appearance of red patch of Mercurochrome over a wound can be jarring but its presence in fact indicates healing.

I worked cross-stitch into the stain areas, again attempting to blend the tones of thread like the liquid media. I stitched shards of porcelain into the Aida to bring my key media together. This is the only page that includes porcelain; the rest of *Rebirth* focuses solely on embroidery.



**Figure 75.** Womb/stain embroidery on handmade felt.

The embroidered design in Figure 75 connects womb and stain iconography, and the theme of catharsis. I made the felt that was used, and incorporated strands of thread and wool into the surface that transform into blood clots floating around the embroidered womb. This piece references the Ancient Greek idea that women's wombs drifted around their bodies causing suffocation and hysteria, and needed to be 'anchored' in place, as well as the belief that menstruation was a healthy form of physical catharsis.



**Figure 76.** Stain embroidery on printed handkerchief.

Figures 76 and 77 show the use handkerchiefs as the base for embroideries. I purchased the handkerchief in Figure 76 from a Pep Store, and the one in Figure 77 from a vintage charity store as I found the 'feminine' designs and colours of the handkerchiefs and the connotations of discretion and privacy that surround personal items like these very intriguing. The



**Figure 77.** Red stain embroidery on vintage handkerchief.

embroidery floss used in Figure 76 was from a collection given to me by my grandmother and the colours I chose for this piece range from soft peachy pinks to deep, dark purple. I built this embroidery up with repetitive layers of blanket stitch that form the stain shape. The heaviness of the stitches, although in delicate, ‘feminine’ colours, contrast against the softness of the handkerchief. I imagined the embroidery becoming a callus or scab, much like the patches of glaze on some of the porcelain cocoons.



**Figure 78.** Moth embroidery on handkerchief.

Figure 77 depicts a red stain. Due to the context of the practice, the stain could symbolise blood from menstruation; childbirth; a split lip; an invasion of the body. It could also be read in connection with moth meconium, as a marker of metamorphosis.

The moth in Figure 78 is the final page in *Rebirth*, and it symbolizes metamorphosis, catharsis and the emergence from an internal space. The emerged moth is ready to fly away, indicating the end of the story and the final escape.



**Figure 79.** Beginning of cover embroidery.

The process of embroidery is metamorphic as it is cathartic and the evolution of the work over time can be observed.

Each small stitch becomes a cell that adds to the growth of the work. Figures 79 to 81 show the development of the cover of *Rebirth* from start to completion. The design of this particular embroidery is the same stain and cocoon iconography that features in my practice, and in this instance it reflects on the process of a caterpillar building a cocoon around itself.



**Figure 80.** Progress of cover embroidery.

As mentioned earlier, throughout the process of making the embroideries I considered possible ways of displaying them,



**Figure 81.** Complete cover embroidery.

including sewn together as a wall-hanging quilt, hidden inside a chest of drawers and displayed individually in different places on exhibition. I opted to bind them as a book to enhance the narrative effect of the series. This book bears strong connections with Louise Bourgeois' *Ode a l'oubli* through the use of collected, used and found fabrics and strong emphasis on the metaphors of needlework. Each embroidery acts independently as a 'page' while becoming part of a larger story and I could control the way in which people view and interpret this story. The act of binding the book and bringing the embroideries together reflects significantly on sewing as a metaphor for healing and suturing (Cheim Read 2011).

## Exhibiting the Work

The final pieces are exhibited together in the tutorial room off the Jack Heath Gallery at the Centre for Visual Arts. I opted to exhibit in this space rather than the gallery due to the small scale and intimacy of my work. The tutorial room creates a contained, private setting.

The exhibition rehearsals I undertook in March and April of 2016 yielded significant contributions towards unpacking art/craft debates and understanding my particular issues of display. The first arrangement (Figure 82) was problematic for a number of reasons. *Tear and Repair* was displayed centrally on the floor, with *Incubation* at its head and the smaller pieces set on plinths arranged around the room. This use of conventional display methods with accepted gallery plinths played to the idea of the ‘white cube’. The works became separated and isolated from one another, resulting in a lack of connection and flow in the viewing of the practice. This loss of dialogue between the works and the space they were in weakened the essence of the practice. I asked how I could manipulate the space further to play to domestic themes and demonstrate the tensions of art/craft divisions.



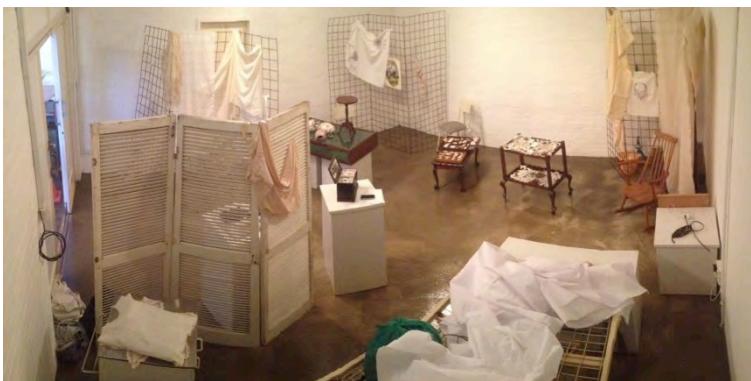
**Figure 82.** First rehearsal of exhibition display.

The second arrangement (Figure 83) demonstrated greater strength at breaking up the space of the ‘white cube’ and negated the traditional layout of 3D works with evenly spaced plinths. I considered the layout and arrangement of homes and how occupants and visitors move through them. The wooden screen was used to mark off a ‘bedroom’ area to the right of the entrance; this division of space into ‘rooms’ of a house seemed to offer the best solution.



**Figure 83.** Second rehearsal of exhibition display.

The final exhibition display (Figure 84) draws on elements of the home to create an intimate, domestic environment.



**Figure 84.** Panorama of final exhibition display in progress.



**Figure 85.** Entry into *Innerspace*, with *Domestic Science* (left), *The Bride* and *The Bride's Protector* (right) at front of room.

To the left at the entrance I placed a metal screen at angle from the wall to form a passageway that would lead the viewer into the exhibition space. To the right, a low plinth and small table provided a prominent space for the display of *The Bride*; situated at the beginning of the passageway, *The Bride* walks the viewer 'down the aisle' into the domestic enclosure. In order to create a dialogue between pieces I positioned *The Bride's Protector* near to *The Bride*, also on a small table and plinth. To the left of the

passageway I situated *Domestic Science* on a tall plinth in front of a screen (Figure 85).

Influenced by Louise Bourgeois' *Cells* (Bernadac 1996), I created hinged metal screens that are partially covered with fabric in order to contain and demarcate the exhibition space. These are suggestive of burglar guards or veranda bars as well as the sides of cages, and imply imprisonment where the captive person is on display; they become permeable

membranes that allow the gaze inwards and outwards. The fabric articles hanging up become an attempt at modesty, covering up and preventing the unwanted outside gaze from entering the private, inner space. Additionally they contribute a layer of warmth and texture to room and hold it together, referencing Faith Wilding's *Crocheted Environment* (Womanhouse 2009).



**Figure 86.** *Incubation* in corner 'study' with screen of garments.

I positioned the first metal screen to delineate an enclosing, study-like area and allow viewers to see glimpses of *Incubation* (Figure 86) through the grid of the screen. The porcelain cocoons were set out on a glass cabinet with a small drinks table that acted as a plinth for one piece; others were on small glass stands or flat on the cabinet with doilies beneath them. The doilies cast shadows over watercolours and butterfly and moth specimens that were arranged inside the cabinet.

Behind *Incubation* another screen had delicate intimate clothing pegged to the bars. (Figure 86) This display of personal items is resonant with the sight of laundry drying from the windows of inner city flats; in these restricted circumstances people's intimate personal belongings are put on public display.



**Figure 87.** *Concept-Material-Process* on coffee table (left) *Pupa* on table (centre) and *Consume* (right).

Next to *Incubation*'s space I displayed *Concept-Material-Process* on a coffee table, with two armchairs at either side of the table. *Pupa* was set on a small table next to one armchair. I positioned *Consume* near the printers tray with a small 'riempie stoel' (a stool with the seat formed from woven leather straps) (Figure 87). By situating these works together I created a 'living room', the public sphere of the home with curiosities to entertain guests; it is also where identities and roles are assumed.

I created the most concealed space of the exhibition to hold *Tear and Repair*. I positioned the area in this way to imply privacy and, potentially, the invasion of a private realm. The walls were stark white and I hung a net curtain behind *Tear and Repair* to emphasise the hospital-like atmosphere (Figure 88). After arranging the bed and quilt, I decided to





**Figure 88.** *Tear and Repair* in 'concealed' area.



**Figure 89.** Blood cells on fishing line grid.



**Figure 90.** *Rebirth* on nightstand.

display the red blood cells beneath it on an 'invisible' grid created by woven lengths of fishing line (Figure 89). This formation reflected on the grids of the hospital bed. The red blood cells appear to be floating just above the floor beneath the bed, and can also be viewed from the top of the bed through the gaps in the quilt.

Next to *Tear and Repair* I placed the embroidery book *Rebirth* on a hospital nightstand (Figure 90). This suggests that *Rebirth* could be a novel or even the private journal of the person who uses the bed. A rocking chair with a small cushion invited viewers to sit and contemplate the bed and page through *Rebirth*. While the bed and nightstand are symbols of the bedroom their metallic existences are cold and sterile, suggesting a hospital setting or even at-home palliative care. This small room-like space within the exhibition references Janice Lester's installation *Personal Space* (Womanhouse 2009).

Around the exhibition space I arranged chairs to invite the viewers to settle in and contemplate the works on display, and take the time to add their own meanings to it. It allowed for viewing from different, unusual angles, unlike in galleries where viewers experience works from a

standing position. The presence of domestic furniture at my exhibition could be potentially unsettling as it implies home, comfort, conversation and relaxation; home art collections can be viewed at ease from a lounge suite. The binaries of 'art' and 'craft', private and public, and domestic and professional are blurred.

The creation of a domestic environment served to strengthen and reinforce the concepts and meanings of my practice, which I have located within frameworks that can influence a number of different interpretations of my exhibition. It references issues of art/craft debates, reinforcing the idea that 'craft' is comfort while 'art' is discomfort, and could to some extent suggest viewer participation while decreasing the distance between the

audience and the work. A feminist reading could also be applied with reference to *Womanhouse*, with the exhibition relating to issues of female experiences within the home and society as a whole. The varying analyses that viewers might apply can assist in highlighting the many nuances and layers to my practice, both practically and conceptually, and contribute to the work by providing many new, potential meanings.

## Conclusion

The central aims of this research were to explore how the concepts, media and processes of my creative practice intersect and to understand how the materiality of my key media, embroidery, textiles and porcelain, contributed to the themes of the practice. A number of research questions were posed to direct both the practical and theoretical research discoveries. These findings were drawn out in Chapter Three through the discussion of the studio processes and final works.

In Chapter One the theoretical framework was established to locate the studio-based research in feminist art, art/craft debates and materiality. These particular facets were incorporated into the framework as the practice unfolded and pointed to these branches of art history. The framework not only located the practice in art history but also contributed to and bolstered the discussion of my work in Chapter Three. A conceptual framework outlining my themes of metamorphosis, catharsis and healing, as well as issues of female experiences with abuse and violence, was included in Chapter One alongside the theoretical framework.

The context and historical backgrounds of my key media were illuminated in Chapter Two. A number of sources were analysed and brought together to illustrate the materiality of my media, both in terms of the historical meanings they have come to embody and their physical qualities. I found that embroidery and textile crafts were established as feminine pastimes alongside the entrenching of 'art' and 'craft' divisions, and that their processes physically embody traits identified as feminine. Despite the forced gendered history of the media, today many women continue to enjoy textile crafts. Likewise, the production of ceramics has a gendered history in British ceramic factories which fed into educational institutions. British styles of teaching ceramics greatly influenced my context of learning at the Ceramics Studio at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Porcelain has a European colonial history of power attached to it, and unique physical qualities that contribute conceptually to practitioners using the medium. Works by Louise Bourgeois as well as *The Dinner Party* and *Womanhouse* formed part of this chapter in contextualizing my practice.

Chapter Three documented the processes of the studio-based research. Within this discussion the theoretical framework was referenced to highlight its relationship with the

practice. The materiality of the media presented in Chapter Two was drawn out further in the discussion of my works in Chapter Three. I discovered that my studio-based experience as a practitioner allowed me greater insight than I might have had if my research was purely theoretical (Malins & Gray 1995:3) and I could contribute significantly to the discussion of my work, particularly to the understanding of how embroidery and other textile crafts embody feminine traits.

Both the physical materiality and historical connotations of embroidery, textiles and porcelain carried critical conceptual weight that linked closely with my themes and processes. This approach of analysing how concepts, media and processes intersect yielded intriguing results. In my practice the processes of making with my media mirrored my themes of metamorphosis, catharsis and healing, while the materiality further strengthened and embodied my themes of addressing issues of gender and gender-based violence. I believe this approach to interrogating one's work could be used by researchers in any creative arts discipline.

Within my practice I set out to combine embroidery, textiles and porcelain in works that were exhibited as part of the research outcomes. I discovered various ways of merging my media: by sewing porcelain into textiles; by imprinting textile textures onto porcelain surfaces; and by slip-casting textiles in porcelain. The integration of these media allowed for a conceptual and material exploration of binary oppositions, which coupled with the gendered materiality of the media. While this research aim was successful, I believe these discoveries are still open for further experimentation in my own work and the work of other practitioners. Additionally, during my reflection on this goal I came to the realisation that the different media were able to create comparable allusions to skin; this is seen in the scab-like appearances of the glazed patches on some porcelain cocoons and the pages of *Rebirth* that are thickly embroidered.

The exhibiting of the completed works provided a challenge when considering the space and layout used, and how the final set-up would influence the reception of the work. Having gone through the processes of rehearsing my exhibition and then strengthening it over several stages, I feel more strongly about practitioners developing appropriate display methods that are tailored to their work. The tutorial room provided a contained space in which to show my intimate, small-scale works. The implications of the 'white cube'

gallery were addressed and potentially negated through a layout that referenced the home and included domestic furniture. The binaries of art/craft, public/private and discomfort/comfort were opposed to highlight the divisions and tensions.

This need for appropriate display tactics and the connection with art/craft debates were significant issues during the making of *Incubation*. While I never doubted the validity of the ceramic sculptures as I did with the soft sculptures, my original intention to display the cocoons on plinths in the gallery did not feel sufficient for the work. This led me to install the cocoons in a group on the glass cabinet which strengthened the power of the series. Regardless of the media and content, if carefully cultivated, the tactics used in displaying work can serve to strengthen the practice.

Developing a format for the dissertation that enabled the sharing of practice-based research results became crucial. The incorporation of in-text thumbnail photographs was useful for illustrating the findings visually and bolstered the textual discussion. Additionally, the size of the thumbnail images in the dissertation accommodated the use of the cell phone camera in photographing works in progress. Research methods need to be accessible and feasible to the average practitioner. Allowing the use of cell phone cameras in the daily photographing of works made this method possible, as most researchers will have access to such technology.

Through critical reflection on my creative practice, this study has found that the media used by practitioners can maximise and strengthen concepts and themes. The combining of embroidery, textiles and porcelain and the reference to their respective histories resulted in compelling outcomes. This approach in general, and the use of these media specifically, open up possibilities for future research in the creative arts.

## Appendix 1



**Illustration 1.** Jessica Steytler, *The Bride*, 2015. Fabric, porcelain and glass. 20 x 20 x 14 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo: Jessica Steytler



**Illustration 2.** Jessica Steytler, *The Bride's Protector*, 2015-2016. Fabric, embroidery, porcelain and found objects, 31 x 27,3 x 27 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo: Jessica Steytler



**Illustration 3.** Jessica Steytler, *Domestic Science*, 2016. Glazed and high-fired porcelain, felt and found printers tray, 4,3 x 35,5 x 26 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo: Jessica Steytler





**Illustration 4.** Jessica Steytler, *Concept-Material-Process*, 2015. Fabric, embroidery, porcelain and natural specimens in found printers tray, 6 x 53 x 43 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo: Jessica Steytler



**Illustration 5.** Jessica Steytler, *Incubation*, 2014-2016. Glazed and high-fired porcelain, felt, watercolour drawings, natural specimens, found crocheted doilies and found cabinet, 85 x 69 x 116 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo: Jessica Steytler



**Illustration 6.** Jessica Steytler, *Consume*, 2015-2016.  
Porcelain, felt, natural specimens, found crocheted  
doilies and found trolley, 75 x 43,5 x 67,5 cm.  
Collection of the artist. Photo: Jessica Steytler



**Illustration 7.** Jessica Steytler, *Tear and Repair*, 2015-2016. Felt, muslin, lace, batting and porcelain on found hospital bed, 72 x 92 x 209 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo: Jessica Steytler



**Illustration 8.** Jessica Steytler, *Rebirth*, 2014-2016.  
Bound embroidered fabric book, 26 x 26,5 x 5 cm.  
Collection of the artist. Photo: Jessica Steytler



**Illustration 9.** Jessica Steytler, *Pupa*, 2015. Fabric scraps and stuffing, 9 x 17,5 x 8,5 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo: Jessica Steytler.

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