

- Anna Eggert
Dion and Caly (2007)
Stainless steel mesh, stainless steel rivets,
compatible paint, glass beads

- Melinda Le Guay
Nymph (2009) and *Ruby* (2009)
Knitted enamelled copper wire and
cotton covered enamelled copper wire
1000x 460 x 200mm
Image courtesy of Brenda May Gallery, Sydney

WIRE MESH STEEL DRESSES

DAS500 MEGAN FIZELL

FEMINIST CONCERNS are at the forefront of Anna Eggert's series of sculpted dresses. The life-size garments, moulded around invisible bodies, appear fragile in spite of the industrial materials used. Influenced by the aesthetic of ancient Greek sculpture, her dresses appear fluid and capture the movement and grace of the early statues. By using stainless steel mesh as her 'fabric', Eggert seeks to re-appropriate a masculine material into a representation of femininity.

Eggert was troubled by the lack of art of women by women within the medium of sculpture, and made her series to 'highlight the way women have, in the past, had to live their lives in male dominated environments.' The garments are made using typical sewing methods and Eggert begins with a clear idea of how the dress will look upon completion. She cuts the flat sheet of mesh into shapes that are bent and riveted into form. Compositionally, the space within the dress is as important as the garment's structure, because through the manipulation of mesh, the illusion of flesh is established.

The lack of an actual body in Eggert's 'portraits' of women emphasises the historic tendency of society to focus superficially upon a person's clothing, enabling one's garments to constrict both physically and socially. The riveted wire mesh mimics the way corsets would limit movement and symbolically denotes the influence of one's clothing in a social context. The dichotomy of the dress, the appearance of fragility coupled with the strength of steel, embodies femininity while reinforcing the idea of the powerful modern woman through the use of durable materials.

As a young girl, Melinda le Guay learned to knit, a skill that she revived to create her intricate and detailed sculptures. Using discarded copper wire, the dresses are knit into a loose mesh with other soft materials – paper, gauze, feathers – woven into the design. Le Guay does not follow a specific pattern, the initial dress was conceptualised as a corset, and that dress became the standardised design that she replicates from memory. She uses needles in varying sizes

to construct her sculptures over a two-week period, with the repetitious act of knitting central to her work. Inspired by artists who have 'used labour intensive repetition or the methodical processes of domestic skills such as knitting, sewing and repair,' the act of knitting not only establishes a visual record of this repetitious act, the nurturing associations connected to this craft also highlight the other themes embodied in the series. The dresses are sometimes layered and create a complex mesh that is hung against a wall. The wire is not bent into uniform stitches and the loops and curls create a haphazard arrangement of shapes.

While Eggert's invisible bodies strain against the rigid mesh, powerful and durable yet persistently constrained, le Guay modifies a masculine material to embody the juxtapositions of femineity, fragile yet strong in order to protect. Using materials in stark opposition to the characteristics the artists intended to embody, the breadth of femineity is duly constructed and considered.



ANNA EGGERT

is represented by Stella Downer Fine Art, Sydney and will be exhibiting in March 2011 at Beaver Gallery, Canberra.

MELINDA LE GUAY

is represented by Brenda May Gallery, Sydney where she will be exhibiting her new series of dresses opening 10 May 2011 until 4 June 2011.