

RECLAIMED – Louise Saxton Fabric Works 2017 – 2021

Louise Saxton's exhibition, *RECLAIMED* with Gould Creative reflects the past five years work fabricating found and gifted domestic materials into an astounding array of two and three-dimensional assemblages of various scale, form and subject.

RECLAIMED continues the artist's unique process of painstakingly excising 'gems' of embroidery and lace from largely 20th century domestic linens; pinning them upon membranes of translucent tulle and in many cases; combining them with other discarded objects from the home.

These finite materials, once treasured by those who made, used and laundered them with care, are now discarded and seen as redundant by a contemporary mindset driven by consumerism and the veneer of the new.

Saxton continues her project of rescuing and elevating materials previously seen as the purview of a woman's private and secluded world and not regarded as art. In many instances this is achieved by reinterpreting details of historical paintings, with the textile fragments replacing pencil and paint. In others it entails colonising objects with the extracted needlework, transforming them, from functional and mundane, into fantastical three-dimensional sculptures.

The artist's mother died in late 2021 and in this exhibition, death is everywhere present. This is not however, a morbid sense of death, but rather a celebration of the lives, of mostly women, who are no longer living. While they may have left us, through Saxton's vision and skill, their hand-work lives on, in complex and dynamic contemporary works of art.

Saxton's late mother Ruth has been a life-long inspiration and motivational force in the artist's practise, especially her reclaimed fabric works of the past sixteen years. Saxton's mother who also quilted and embroidered, passed down to her daughters a deep love of making-by-hand and particularly the ability to sew and knit their own clothes. More importantly than this source of inspiration, *RECLAIMED Louise Saxton Fabric Works*, with its countless lace and beading pins securing the needlework fragments in place, embodies a sense of both physical and existential pain. Pins and sharp scissors of course represent actual pain incurred in the process of both domestic and studio arts and, her mother's creative life, confined as it was to the home was, as Louise Bourgeois said, her sanity. Saxton's mother suffered recurring bouts of mental illness throughout her adult life but when well, always returned to her crafts and the sanctuary of a creative space within the home, even when simply a table and cupboards in her laundry or enclosed verandah.

Saxton's mother facilitated her daughter's artistic sensibility from a young age, enrolling her in oil painting classes on weekends and sharing her tiny pottery studio, in a boiler room under the house, so that she could make paintings as a teenager. The work in RECLAIMED honours the home as a source of both intense creativity and beauty while at the same time, every pin is a sharp reminder that life is also fragile, precarious and often painful.

This exhibition of mixed-media assemblages includes two reinterpretations of details from Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (c. 1665), Frida Kahlo's exquisite pencil drawing, *Self Portrait* (1946) and a detail of a watercolour drawing by Ferdinand Bauer (c.1860) of a koala and joey, all of which from a distance allude to construction by traditional media. Up close however, the viewer is overwhelmed by a dazzling array of exquisite embroidered and lace fragments, made by the hands of others, and reminiscent of Arcimboldo's composite paintings. For the koala and joey, in which Bauer reflects a certain "cuteness" we have come to associate with of our beloved icon, the artist has added a fiery background of intense orange, reds and purples. The work, which Saxton has titled *Flee*, was commenced directly after the devastating bushfires of early 2020, in which tens of thousands of koalas perished.

Other stand-out works in this exhibition are two large-scale assemblages built on reclaimed dress-makers mannequins, which reference coral structures and were inspired by the underwater coral-regeneration sculptures of Jason deCaires Taylor. Through their bodily forms, *Coral Amber and Coral Dolores*, 2020-21 point to our urgent need to make a human connection with this vulnerable natural phenomenon. RECLAIMED extends the link that Saxton seeks to draw, between disappearing materials of the home and the vulnerability of species in the natural world, which began the moment she first took sharp scissors to finely embroidered or lace doilies.

RECLAIMED also includes several pieces from *The Linen Project*, Saxton's major exhibition for two public galleries in 2018 and 2019, and several others included in SPRING 1883, Sydney 2019.

RECLAIMED: Louise Saxton Fabric Works 2017 – 2021 is on show at Gould Creative, @14Langridge St, Collingwood from 12 February – 5 March 2022.

BIO

Louise Saxton is a Melbourne based artist who is known for her unique practice transforming vintage and antique needlework into contemporary artworks.

Saxton has committed to working with discarded materials from the home for more than two decades. Over the past sixteen years she has developed a unique assemblage process, whereby delicate lace-pins are employed to secure countless textile fragments upon a base of translucent tulle.

The artist also collects and reimagines other domestic objects, such as wild-flower illustrations, an antique French chandelier, milliners and dress-makers mannequins, collectable and keepsake porcelain flowers and an array of sewing paraphernalia. These discarded materials of bygone eras are also transformed into dynamic two and three-dimensional assemblages. The artist often reinterprets art-historical imagery to draw a link between the vulnerability of both domestic-art traditions and species in the natural world; and draw attention to the under-rated role of women and the home in art history. With incredible attention to detail, through materiality and process, Saxton's work seamlessly merges both visual art and craft traditions.

Louise Saxton has exhibited extensively in Australia, Europe, the USA and Southeast Asia. Her work is held in both private and public collections in Australia and internationally.