



F U T U R E A R T E F A C T S

ALEXI FREEMAN + TESSA BLAZEY + JANE BURTON

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ALEXI FREEMAN
TESSA BLAZEY
JANE BURTON

CRAFT VICTORIA
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Australian
Design
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Karen Woodbury Fine Art

craft



NEO LACE GOWN UNDER CONSTRUCTION, 2011

FUTURE ARTEFACTS

Future Artefacts is the culmination of a seven-year collaboration between Tessa Blazey and Alexi Freeman. This exhibition at Craft Victoria fuses fashion and jewellery to create a series of sculptural artefacts conceptually underpinned by a fascination with science fiction, archaeology and intricate craftsmanship. *Future Artefacts* is a portal to the past and the future, both of which have always played roles inspiring writers, filmmakers and designers either to plunder the past or to conceive of brave new worlds—both utopian and dystopian—often in the form of enmeshed and conflicting combinations. Either way, the intention is usually to create new visions of what the future may look like and who the inhabitants might be. Often it is ironic and playful, (*Barbarella* 1968); eerie and other worldly (*The Man Who Fell to Earth* 1976; *Under the Skin* 2013); neo-noir (*Blade Runner* 1982) or obscure and ambiguous (2001: A Space Odyssey 1968). Whether it takes the form of intergalactic visitors learning about a new planet; alien predators or vulnerable victims in a strange land; the protagonists are usually witnessing and experiencing a world or deep space for the first time. Blazey and Freeman propose their mysterious and magical artefacts are archaeological discoveries in a time yet to come, and may shape our understanding and interpretation of common and changing evolutionary threads—temporally and aesthetically—between art, fashion design and contemporary jewellery.

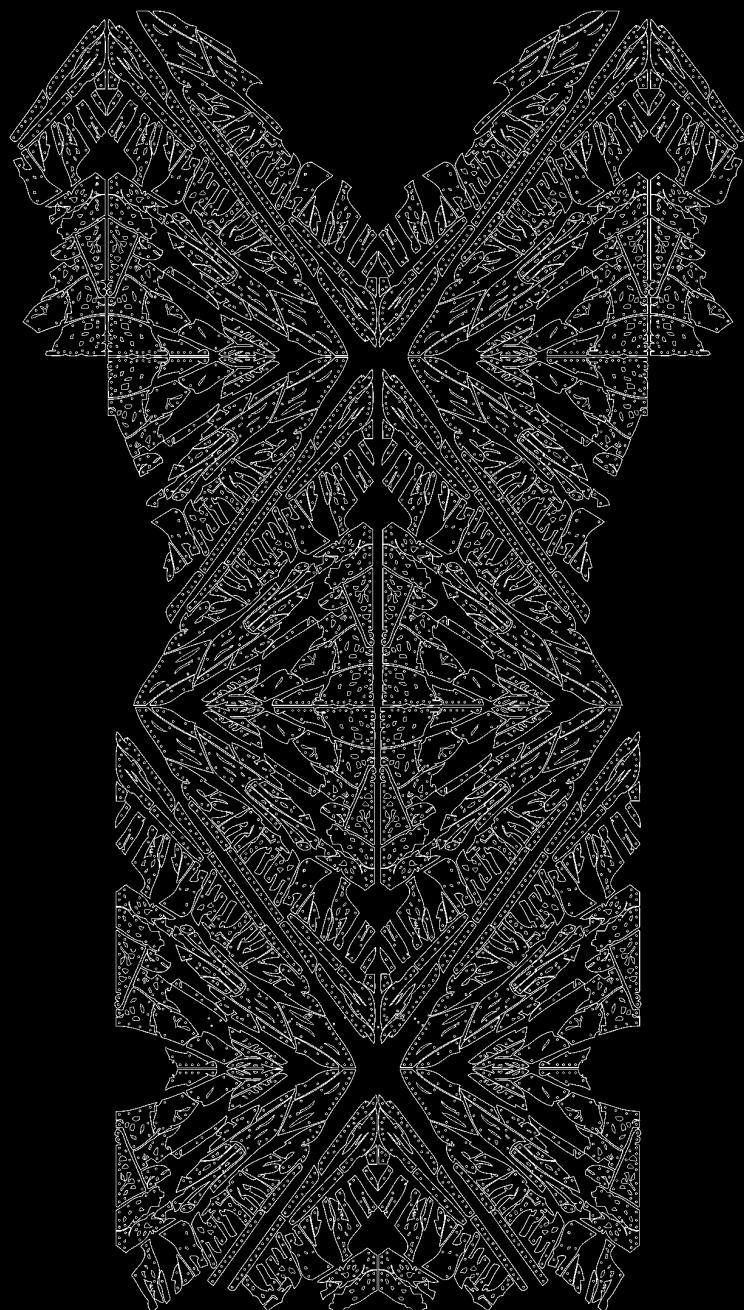
There are similarities in the making process that link these artefacts to iconic fashion and costume pieces created by Paco Rabanne in the 1960s, in particular, the use of pliers rather than needle and thread; an architectural approach to construction; the use of plastic and metal materials; and a celebration of the ornamental and whimsical. Early space age collections and his creations for *Barbarella* reflected a decade which saw haute couture respond to Youthquake, a movement that bubbled up to create a new order inspired by youth and pop culture. And for Rabanne who believed he was an alien from a planet called Altair travelling to earth over 78,000 years ago, there were perhaps far more complex influences and inspirations. According to author Renée Tobe, he believed ‘the search for a brave new world is a noble and unending one’, and Blazey and Freeman’s experimental and exploratory work create an intriguing window into an imaginary future with fresh eyes and ideas to what it might be. This world exists in a liminal space between art and fashion, and where Rabanne transgressed the conventions of couture with dresses made with easily connected large plastic discs, which were also packaged in DIY dress kits for *crafty* wearers, these one-off artefacts are the result of thousands of hours of artisanal, inventive craftsmanship that require highly specialized skills and knowledge.



INTERSTELLAR GOWN, 2012, PHOTO BY JORGE DE ARAUJO

Future Artefacts has also involved a collaboration with contemporary artist Jane Burton to create a series of photographs featuring the sculptural works in ethereal settings. According to Ingrid Periz, Burton is known for ‘conjuring a dark broodiness’ and painterly landscapes with a filmic noir quality. Featured locations such as the Organ Pipes National Park with its basalt columns and cathedral-like grandeur are suggestive of mystical and unexplored frontiers and provided an ideal setting for the materialisation of alluring, mythical beings sheathed in finely-crafted celestial gowns. Discovered and installed at Craft Victoria the method of display is inspired by Wunderkammer (cabinet of curiosities) intersecting disciplines to bring together extraordinary objects and photographs—wondrous and exotic—brought together by artist Kate Rohde’s resin sculptures as props and Byron Meyer’s ambient soundscape. All specimens are assembled for acquisition, enticing collectables to be recovered in the future by archaeologists and no doubt displayed as rare and beautiful objects that will delight museum visitors possibly from earth or galaxies far, far away.

Dr Christine Schmidt 2017



GOWN OF RELICS, 2012, LASER CUTTING FILE

FUTURE ARTEFACTS – Alexi Freeman, Tessa Blazey & Jane Burton in conversation with Karen Woodbury

The exhibition Future Artefacts brings together three very distinct creative voices, each well known in their respective fields for their unique and particular vision: that of fashion designer Alexi Freeman, contemporary jeweller Tessa Blazey, and photographic artist Jane Burton.

Throughout the collection the delineation between fashion, design, sculpture and photography is well and truly blurred, enabling it to sit outside traditional categorisation. The collaborative nature of the project has enabled the artists to use their technical strengths and creative imperatives to influence and embolden each other, as they riff off the historical and pop cultural references imbued in the narrative.

How did the collaboration evolve?

A (Alexi): I rocked up to Tessa's Blade Runner party in 2008 and I recall there being some pretty unreal sci-fi costumes there... A couple of years later when I opened an ALEXI FREEMAN boutique in the old GPO building, I remembered Tessa, and her amazing Fiction jewellery range and I thought it would be pretty darn awesome to stock her work in my store...

T (Tessa): Not long after I started stocking Alexi's store we decided to team up to collaborate on a design entry for the Powerhouse Museum International Lace Award in 2011. The proposal featured an elaborate sterling silver dress constructed of customised jewellery components. It was an ambitious proposal and we were both excited - and terrified - to discover our design had been selected as a finalist in the awards exhibition - so now we were going to have to construct this fanciful piece, resulting in the work Neo Lace Gown. Since then we have collaborated on five major pieces, which have been shown at the Powerhouse Museum, Craft Victoria, Pieces of Eight in Melbourne and the National Gallery of Victoria.

How did Jane Burton's involvement transpire? How have you responded to her interpretation of the work?

T: Karen I believe we have you to thank for Jane's involvement. You suggested it might be great for us to work with a photographer from your stable and we found Jane's work captivating. We were looking to create and communicate an evocative narrative around the works. Jane's photography is so mysterious and ethereal it seemed the perfect fit. It has been so inspiring working with Jane and to see our works in a whole new light. We have road tripped to many wild



GOWN OF SHADOWS, UNDER CONSTRUCTION, 2013

and beautiful Victorian locations together such as Cape Schank, Point Nepean and Organ Pipes National Park to realise these images. She is such an intrepid photographer. On one occasion, we were photographing the Interstellar Gown at St Pauls Beach, Sorrento at sunset – Jane was standing knee deep on a sandstone reef as the tide was rapidly coming in. We had to scramble around in the rising sea to capture the last light of the golden hour to save camera cases and other shoot paraphernalia from floating out to sea.

A: Working with Jane has been a very collaborative process at every step of the way bar the moment where Jane has opened and closed the shutter. As a three-way discussion between Jane, Tessa and myself, we have agreed upon the locations where each piece should be shot and how the work should be placed in the environment. We are thrilled with the resulting photographs, as we feel they evoke the near future scenarios we were searching for when setting out to produce this body of work.

Jane, you came into the project much later, bringing your own interpretation of the work. What were your initial thoughts about the garments Tessa and Alexi had produced and how did you work with the objects using your own vernacular?

J: Initially, when I was invited by Tessa and Alexi to collaborate with them for an exhibition of their distinctive garments, I presumed that I would be photographing them on a model, as is my mode. I could easily visualise how their exquisitely constructed pieces would look draped upon the body and how I might enhance and sculpt form with the affects of theatrical lighting. The materiality of chainmail against skin excited me; the semi-transparency; their web-like or reptilian appearance; the tactility. But as things developed, the concept, or narrative of the project evolved and it was decided that the gowns would be photographed in the landscape, presenting quite a challenge to me: how to give form to garments that are designed for the body, in the absence of a body?

Tell me a little about each of your practical creative input into the project?

A: Since my early investigations with crocheting red anodized wire to make a kind of arterial chainmail late last century, I have been fascinated with the idea of creating metal textiles. When Tessa and I met we shared a vision of some sci-fi inspired designs we would like to create and we felt that we could collaborate on some pieces that became greater than the sum of their parts.

T: Coming from a jewellery background I approached the project imagining how these pieces could become complex and elaborate scaled up versions of necklaces. For Neo Lace Gown we utilised chain, jump rings and a customised



GOWN OF COPPER, UNDER CONSTRUCTION, 2016

module we designed (to be cast), which linked all the components together and created a geometric deco-like pattern in the dress. The first piece, Neo Lace Gown, has a gossamer or web-like construction with hundreds of threads of fine chain linking to the diamond shaped modules which frame the overall graphic in the gown.

J: As I came into the project later, I hadn't seen so much of the making of the garments, just the arrestingly beautiful results. I felt rather daunted by borrowing or handling these delicate and unruly creations. So I was very glad to have Tessa and Alexi with me on each of the photo-shoots, grateful for their assistance in placing and arranging the gowns in the landscape. But more than this, it was great to have their camaraderie on these trips into the wilds, where we shared our thoughts and inspirations for the work. This fed into our collective vision of the narrative we were creating; the scenography viewed through the lens of a post-apocalyptic future.

Are the roles in such an undertaking clearly demarcated or is the whole process more fluid and symbiotic with both personalities influencing both design and production?

A: I think it's fair to say that I'm a lot more comfortable wielding a pair of shears and Tessa is a lot more useful with a micro torch, but for the most part our collaboration is a pretty fluid process that is adapted on a case-by-case basis. We create these pieces with a loose plan in mind, but also with plenty of wiggle room for the design to shift and change over time.

T: Once we have a plan for the aesthetic of a new piece and what materials we might be working with I guess I come at each of the projects from a more technical angle. For example, what components might be best to use and how can the piece be constructed to be beautiful but also work well structurally. Can the substantial weight of these metal components be spread out across the body so the components don't collapse under the weight of the piece?

What was the most challenging aspect and conversely, what has been the most rewarding about the project?

T: I would say for me the intensive time commitment has been the most challenging aspect of the project overall. The series of gowns we have constructed have literally taken us thousands of hours to produce over the past 7 years. Fitting this time in around our individual practices and lives has been tricky at times. This exhibition has been a long time in the making and now seeing it all come together to communicate an evocative narrative has



NEO LACE GOWN, 2011, PHOTO BY MARIJA IVKOVIC

been incredibly rewarding. I have found seeing our works placed into wild landscapes in Jane's photographs has enabled me to see the project in a new light, which is very exciting.

A: What she said.

J: It was a great challenge to find a way to successfully photograph garments designed for the body, in a landscape setting without a comparable form on which to mold them. Each landscape we visited was dynamic in its own way and the challenge was to make each gown part of that setting whilst at the same time giving it a life-force and presence of its own. I was very much driven to somehow 'animate' these gowns; have them tell a story. Working in the wilds is always a challenge but one I relish and prefer to the blank confines of a studio. But then, natural landscapes are untamed and changeable, in light and weather conditions. This meant that I approached each photo-shoot with a resolve to just leap in and work quickly and intuitively. I had to trust my instincts in practical ways as well as to trust in my conceptual interpretation of the mis-en-scène. This was liberating and rewarding.

The themes in the work are very distinctive, can you expand on your influences and the narrative surrounding the work?

T: The collaborative pieces in Future Artefacts are heavily inspired by the aesthetic of science fiction, the techniques of medieval scale armour and art deco. We also pay homage to the incredible costume work that Paco Rabanne did for the cult sci-fi film Barbarella, with constructing plastic and metal textiles.

A: Yeh I totally agree and I feel the one-off pieces that jeweller Shaun Leane did for the runway shows during Alexander McQueen's life were also hugely influential. We've constructed a fictional narrative around the idea that the pieces we've made have been discovered and consequently photographed in a near-future setting. Jane Burton's photographs are then displayed to contextualise where the pieces were discovered, while the pieces themselves are unearthed and placed in the gallery as the archaeological exoskeletons of previously undiscovered cultures.

The photographs have been very effective in rounding out the 'story' for the exhibition. What influenced you to choose the specific locations?

T: The landscape has become a very significant element in the exhibition as a way of reimagining the works and the stories around them. The carefully chosen sites are otherworldly and ethereal and could be set in some post-apocalyptic future. The locations were inspired in particular by the Jupiter and



INTERSTELLAR GOWN, 2012, PHOTO BY MARNIE HADDAD

landing scene in Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey.

J: As Tessa expressed, the landscapes were chosen for their primeval appearance, their anthropomorphic resonances, or post-apocalyptic aura: places sculpted through volcanic eruption, by wind, and water; structures built by man and then abandoned. These settings speak of the history of the earth and of its inhabitants, past and future.



GOWN OF RELICS, 2012, PHOTO BY MARNIE HADDAD



GOWN OF SHADOWS, 2014, PHOTO BY PAUL PHILIPSON



GOWN OF COPPER, 2017, PHOTO BY PAUL PHILIPSON

FUTURE ARTEFACTS #1 - #5, 2016 - 2017
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JANE BURTON













BIOGRAPHIES

Alexi Freeman & Tessa Blazey

The collaborative duo have created a series of sculptural works since 2010. During this time, these projects have evolved significantly as have their artisanal skills and grasp on contemporary modes of production.

Their individual practices have contributed substantially to their ongoing collaborative arts practice. This fusion of skills combining visual arts concepts with jewellery techniques, textile and garment methods have resulted in the development of a unique visual arts practice which we continues to expand through the realisation of their ongoing practice.

They have produced a number of highly labour intensive conceptual jewellery sculptures that have been exhibited at a range of public institutions including the Powerhouse Museum, Craft Victoria and the National Gallery of Victoria. They have spoke about their practice on numerous occasions, including public presentations at Craft Victoria, Wangaratta Art Gallery, Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery and Warrnambool Art Gallery. Their previous work has toured extensively via NETS and they are 2016 recipients of Australia Council for the Arts funding.

Jane Burton

Burton is a photographic artist known for her depictions of female sensuality and sexuality, brooding landscapes, derelict architectures and abandoned interiors. Her pictures are drenched in a dark moodiness of the Gothic and bathed in a light that is cinematic and dreamlike, evoking charged atmospheres of desire and melancholy, mystery and menace. Predominantly, an isolated female figure – more often a nude - anchors a mis-en-scène redolent of crime-scene noir, Romantic Painting and the horror genre: atmospheres that allude to intricate fictions and morbid melodrama. Played out in interior spaces and within the landscape, Burton's figures - whether women or children – often appear ethereal; like ghostly incarnations of memories, dreams, and fantasies. They exist at the liminal threshold of presence and absence, shifting between the material world of flesh and blood and that of the spirit, the psyche and the deep subconscious. Jane has an established fine arts practice and has exhibited extensively in Australia and internationally and her previous work is represented in major art collections including the National Gallery of Australia.



INTERSTELLAR GOWN UNDER CONSTRUCTION, 2012



THANK YOU

Jane Burton
Karen Woodbury
Kate Rohde
Byron Meyer
Emma Mayall
Melanie Katsalidis
Christine Schmidt
Nella Themelios
Katie Somerville
Danielle Whitfield
Lindie Ward
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Craft Victoria
Chantal Kirby
Steven Blick
Kirsha Kaechelle
Paul Philipson
Marnie Haddad
Marija Ivkovic
Nadja Mott
Caroline Dickinson
Verena Coronado
CPL Digital
Dallas Graham
Sarah Weston
Daniel Frigo

Cover image
Future Artefacts #4, 2017
Photo by Jane Burton

Front inside cover
Neo Lace Gown, 2011
Photo by Marija Ivkovic

Back inside cover
Interstellar Gown worn by Kirsha Kaechelle
Photo by Misty Bateman

Tessa Blazey is represented by Pieces of Eight Gallery, Melbourne
Jane Burton is represented by Bett Gallery, Hobart.

All of the artists would like to thank the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation as the true custodians of the land on which we are privileged to hold our exhibition at Craft Victoria.

We would also like to pay our respects to the Gadigal of the Eora Nation as the true custodians of the land on which our exhibition at the Australian Design Centre will take place. We acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded and we extend our respect to Elders both past, present and future.

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ALEXI FREEMAN & TESSA BLAZEY, VERSAILLE-FI PARTY, 2014