



A STITCH IN TIME

AN EXHIBITION BY

VANESSA GOUNDEN & AMITA MAKAN

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A STITCH IN TIME

A N E X H I B I T I O N B Y

VANESSA GOUNDEN & AMITA MAKAN



A STITCH IN TIME AS A NEW FORM OF CONTEMPORARY, CREATIVE PRACTICE

INTRODUCTION

A Stitch in Time is a project of alluring complexity; significant in the way it originates a novel contemporary creative method and then pioneers the resulting material products into a sector that may be described as the social politics of humanity. Mapping this heady combination of theory and practice requires the exactitude of logic. A sensible first step would be to list its fundamental elements via its foundations of origin, cornerstones of demarcation and intentions of scope. The gift from this methodical task is a set of structural views that describe the nature of the project and define its form. Thus it is here, sensibly, where this text begins.

A Stitch in Time is an alliance between fashion designer Vanessa Gounden, artist Amita Makan and Reach for Recovery, an international breast cancer support group. These are three very different sectors and the project's intention is to develop and test a model where new,

collaborative forms of creative practice are assessed by their efficacies of the power to initiate proactive, constructive, social change.

For the collaboration, Gounden commissioned Makan to produce a series of embroidered artworks that provide a personal narrative of breast cancer where the emotive is set in conversation with the biomedical. This visual chronicle, through the commonality of shared experience, becomes an account of all women who experience this form of trauma. Makan's artwork then provided the visual reference for Gounden's interpretation as prints onto fabrics sourced from the leading edge of contemporary textile invention. Design and construction of garments employ the tenets and technologies of sculpture, thereby completing a process that now distinguishes the brand, and which has resulted in a genre the designer has come to define as 'wearable art'.



In the sector of fashion, this is often where the narrative would end. However, A Stitch in Time is a project that aims to develop and test a model where the creative processes advance the functionalities of healthy societies.

The stimulus for the collection is breast cancer, a field of increasing urgency and paucity of means. Reach for Recovery – the project's third partner – is an international non-governmental organization that works to expedite early detection and effective treatment. In instances of surgical necessity, the group renders prosthetic support to women who experience this form of severe physical distress.

Through their support of the project, Gounden's clients become affiliates of Reach for Recovery, and are thus able to provide direct and material support for survivors of breast cancer. Via transactions that transcend the economies of fashion, individuals become collectives that,

in turn, continue to grow in numbers and efficacies through the project's public education campaign. It is this process of collaboration that becomes the vehicle to advocate for real and significant change.

The project selects components from a number of referents across a range of disciplines, most noteworthy from art history and developmental studies. These methodologies are then adapted and combined, and adjuncted with novel processes, to create its model. The function of this text is to locate these referents, map their application, and demonstrate the project's process of evolution into a form of cultural articulation that, ultimately, may be defined as a new form of creative expression, one that draws its significance from its adaptability to the nuances of different situations, places and times.

SOCIAL ART

The primary aim of A Stitch in Time is to address the social dynamics and needs of communities by using culture as vehicles for collaboration, analysis, engagement, commentary and development. The project locates its context within that of the changing role of the creative industries from rarefied temples towards people-centered, dynamic collaborations.

The move from modernism to post-modern experiential forms finds creative practitioners turning to interactivity, imbuing their work with an even greater capacity through alliance with programmes not traditionally associated with cultural movements. This return to pre-renaissance, socialist values reflects a critical realism where creative practitioners act for and with others in reclaiming responsibility for their futures. Within this historical context of social art are located the founding principles of A Stitch in Time.

However, social art processes are akin to the new social movements that exemplify the cause-driven crusades that strive for the furthering of feminism, ecology, political systems and equality, with culture an integral aspect. When the campaign mandates are achieved, these movements lose their vigour.

Fluctuations may be interpreted as a lack of procedural methodology and undefined structures for sustainability, or may possibly have arisen from the limits of specialization, or through restricted or unexplored cross-field application. Further, their agendas – often directed against bureaucracies, governments and associated structures – did not apply the ongoing power inherent in art outputs; products were not assigned appropriate economic nor cultural value; economies and financial systems were derided and disrespected, and industrialization not embraced as an ally.

Although the genre's art-based practices were within the gambit of its methodology, its 'non-art' activities were not allocated the same status. This restricted view manifested in the unproductive (and now dated) debate about what could be defined as art, and what not. But ironically, it was within these non-art sectors where creative practices were able to expand into the realm of thought, communication and action. Thus, although the practical philosophy of A Stitch in Time might have its formative roots within a social art movement, the limitations and contradictions of social art encourage this text to find other, more fitting references as precursors for an expanded view of art.

SOCIAL SCULPTURE

Social sculpture is a conceptual practice championed by Joseph Beuys that classifies human and social endeavours as forms of art making. Further, it situates within every person the potential to sculpt his or her own environment using the substance of humanity as its creative material. Shelley Sack relates its value in connective practice, with collaborations and cross-field networks as strategies. These features of social sculpture share salient congruencies with *A Stitch in Time*.

Beuys wrote that the practice 'should provoke thoughts about what sculpture can be and how the concept of sculpting can be extended to the invisible materials used by everyone.' He locates this form of sculptural construction within thinking forms (how we mold our thoughts) and spoken forms (how we shape our thoughts into words) – configurations which then culminate in social sculpture (how we mold and shape the world in which we live.)

This thesis by Beuys signals two critical qualities of social sculpture. In the first instance, I (the self) is paramount in the lived experience, found within even the most seemingly sub-conscious of events – a fleeting thought, for example. In the second instance, Beuys asserts that the formation of

life experience is analogous to the techniques of sculpture. However, unlike the physical parameters of traditional sculpture, the materials for social sculpture are intangible, as befits their ultimate expression as intangible forms of the cerebral, psychological, rational, intellectual, spiritual, emotional, perceptual and abstract.

The agency of a social sculptor is in effecting a shift in a society. Although these shifts may be quantifiable, their causative agents would be in the arena of the qualitative and the ephemeral. Thus, to return to *A Shift in Time*, it seems possible that appropriate shifts within its network would require the application of three forces – care, mobilization and organization – which form part of that intangible crux of humanity named the 'soul'.

It might be that *A Shift in Time* harnesses the invisible tools of social sculpture that, for Beuys, include thoughts, words, intentions, a list Sack extends into questions, speech, discussion and listening processes. The project sees contributors becoming part of the social sculpture and also creators of the repercussive effect, as an enactment of Beuys's maxim that 'Life must be renewed by the lessons of art in order to be sustained'.

The notion of care is of primary importance in social sculpture, and it is within the sector of breast cancer that A Stitch in Time finds reason to develop and demonstrate this intangible form of expression. Jemal Ahmedin and his team wrote, in 2011, that 'Breast cancer is the... leading cause of cancer death among females, accounting for 23% of the total cancer cases and 14% of the cancer deaths', and further that 'A substantial proportion of the worldwide burden of cancer could be prevented through the application of existing cancer control knowledge and by implementing programs for ... early detection and treatment, as well as public health campaigns.' Within this context, the organization Reach For Recovery established a non-medical programme

designed to help women with breast cancer in their return to daily life. In South Africa, the organization is an autonomous non-profit organisation run by volunteers since the late 1960's. It is one of the only national patient-support structures, adjuncted in by a prosthesis service.

Although A Stitch in Time establishes a firm grounding within social sculpture, a major diversion is with the project's emphasis on the role of the object – the garment – in the creative process. Not merely a tangible output, the garment, here, is a vital, primary agent, as important as its human collaborators.

ACTOR NETWORK THEORY

The Actor Network Theory (ANT) considers how the components of technology (termed 'actors') function in relation to one another. As with *A Stitch in Time*, its central tool is 'translation' – an activity defined by Michel Callon in 1986 as 'the process of forming a network'.

Of further pertinence is ANT's assignation of formative authority to both human and non-human actors. (In *A Stitch in Time*, the non-human actors, the object, take the form of the garment.) ANT asserts that both human and non-human actors are part of the same intellectual framework within the context of technological processes and, as such, have equal importance, value, and ability to influence the environment within which they operate. In his 2005 book *Resembling the Social*, Bruno Latour describes this phenomenon as 'objects with agency – things that make something happen'.

Contemporary sociology is a discipline where human actors are assumed to be the primary force of change, but Latour is incredulous that this discipline 'remains without object'. A simple solution to negate this arrogance, he writes, is to ask in reference to an object, 'Does it make a difference in the course of some other agent's action or not?' By answering, inevitably, 'Yes', it

implies that objects are not only actors but, he continues 'more precisely, participants in the course of action' in that they might influence a course of action. Latour encourages practitioners of technology to examine all participants assembled into a process, and 'to design a way to make them act as a durable whole.' By linking the material and the social, Latour provides an understanding how, with *A Stitch in Time*, 'a collective action is possible' by allowing the material objects to do their work.

For *A Stitch in Time* this heralds an evolution in the understanding of the importance of its garments: a move away from a simplistic focus on the human in society, and towards an understanding of all the role players in a new group described by ANT as 'the collective'. A study of the garments thus becomes a way to extend this understanding of complexity of interactions and influences known, in academic sectors, as 'entanglement'.

But still the question vexing this text is not yet resolved. Although *A Stitch in Time* references key aspects of the ANT, the theory does not allow for an understanding of the project's activist agenda.





ARTIVISM

The word 'Artivism' combines the sounds and meanings of 'art' with 'activism', to form a genre of art referenced by A Stitch in Time in its theory and practice.

Manuel Delgado, in his *Limits of Critique* (undated) places the origin of artivism with the anti-globalisation movement at the end of the 1990s, and its trans-national calls for action, with 'local activities tied to newly minted social movements'. Human suffering and injustice motivated activist agendas, and actions took the form of resistance to an opposing force. The

'oppositional consciousness' work of Chela Sandoval provided an academic underpinning to a new language of expression – which included forms of street culture – that became both forms of art and tools of revolution. It is this amalgamation that A Stitch in Time references in its links with breast cancer advocacy. However, as with the genres discussed above, there are notable differences. Most strikingly, A Stitch in Time is adamant in its inclusion of economic, business and industrial institutional process as critical apparatus.

CONCLUSION

Striving for an enduring impact is the ultimate goal of all of humanity. It is also the fundamental ideal in each of the disciplines referenced by A Stitch in Time. Yet what sets this project apart – and is its key contribution towards contemporary creative practice – is the central location of a set of techniques for sustainability.

A Stitch in Time advances its viability by integrating the primary agents of art, fashion and development with forms of collaboration, networks, and systems and processes. The result is a stable, cohesive structure which adds new components to elements selected from historical predecessors; combining them into a new configuration of creative expression. What sets it apart, though, is its integration of a structural support based on the principles and practices of industry and economy – a novel

category of integration that proves key to its ongoing viability.

The design of the project, via its references, components, activities and outcomes, is one that is open and fluid. Its conceptual framework structures a working method, but does not define its substance. It uses specific content as a case study to generate a model for integrating art, fashion and communities with structures of industrial production and economies of cultural, symbolic and financial value. This illuminates the leading contribution of A Stitch in Time: the design of a flexible form of creative expression where origins of sustainable practice are positioned within its capacity to adapt to different content and contexts, actors, conditions and situations, and places and times.

NARRATIVE, GRAMMAR AND FIGURES OF SPEECH IN THE WORK OF AMITA MAKAN

NARRATIVE POWER

Within the exhilarating domain of creative invention, it is the narrative that I find most compelling. The allure is not vested in its safe linearity nor in its comforts of structure, and not found in the satisfactions of mysteries deciphered or love required. Instead, it is the simple act of immersion – becoming part of that world, feeling what the characters feel and experiencing their reality – that draws me to this format. Powerful narratives are able to do this: allowing me, the reader, to move from being an external observer to being a participant – integrated, entwined and entangled – with the agency to influence storylines, and to generate new scenarios within which I am effectively complicit.

Amita Makan's new series of artwork describes the process of coming to terms with breast cancer. It takes the form of a narrative of the personal and familial experiences of the artist. The work is produced in fabric, a decision Makan writes is based on the fact that 'Fabric is reminiscent of skin – sensual, porous, and vulnerable to time', and that 'The art-making process combined with the repetitive act of cutting threads, fabrics, and obsessive stitching have strong associations to the disease of breast cancer.' Cotton gauze and silk threads provide further association with surgical suturing. Here – in material and process – is vested the first indication of Makan's use of the languages of iconography.





Waiting I, 2014
H 43.3 x W 43.3 x D 2.8cm

THE MADNESS OF THE WAIT

Waiting I - The first chapter comes in the form of an artwork titled *Waiting I*, within which a solitary woman sits, seemingly still, as if time were held in suspension. The foundation to Makan's narrative is a visual description of the wait: the wait for examination, for diagnosis, for treatment and often the wait for death. The figure, within an expanse of empty space, is isolated to all but her feelings and thoughts.

The artwork is viewed from the front and back – they are of equal importance, and the whole picture may only be gleaned once thus considered. The back of *Waiting I* is a mess of knots and loose threads. It is where the neatness of the front stitch has unraveled; where composure becomes chaos, and the poise of waiting accompanies discordant uncertainty, anxiety and confusion. It establishes the relationship between quiet reflection and noisy fear.

The figure in *Waiting I* has features that are sketched in only the briefest of stitches. Those lines that define the portrait are either missing, or only hinted at. The artwork, although initially thought to be a portrait, thus becomes less discernable as a specific person. Instead, the figure becomes a proxy – a synecdoche – standing in for any number of women, as one within a global group.





Whitney Dress (Fabric: Neoprene)



Angelina Jump Suit & Nadezhda Trench Coat
(Fabric: Silk Organza)



Black Suu Kyi dress
(Fabric: Silk Organza)



Couture Exhibition Collection Piece
with Applique (Fabric: Silk Organza)



Waiting II, 2015
H 109.4 x W 99.5 x D 2.8cm

Waiting II - This metaphor of the proxy is continued into *Waiting II*, an embroidered reconstruction of Venus de Milo. Severed arms are the distinguishing feature of the marble statue of the ancient Greek goddess of love and beauty. In Makan's version the head has also been removed. Whilst the facial features in *Waiting I* were no more than the merest of hints, in *Waiting II* the face has been dispensed with entirely. What at first was discernible as the goddess of beauty and love is now rendered faceless and nameless. The conceptual power of this visual strategy is that she becomes, here, a proxy for any person.

Again, as with the preceding work, the stitched order of the front becomes a knotted tangle

at the back. The sheer of marble becomes, at the back, an antithesis of stability. Again, the calm self-possession gives way to the tumultuous psychology of not being oneself; being beside oneself, in a state of unease – in a state of (dis)ease.

Abstraction is defined as the process of taking away or removing characteristics from something to reduce it to one set of essential characteristics, and this is the experience when moving from the front of the artwork to its back. The traits of individual recognition give way to an empathy derived from shared, fundamental emotions. The person at the front of the work becomes, at the back, a depiction of the terrible psychology of this form of waiting.









Mariam Trench Coat and Mariam Dress
(Fabric: Dutchess Satin)



Amita Dress
(Fabric: Silver Satin)



Mariam Jacket and Mariam Trousers
(Fabric: Dutchess Satin)



Mammogram, 2015
H 225 x W 127 x D 2.2cm

THE TEST AS A BATTLE-GROUND

It is within the mammogram, an x-ray film composed of dark and light tissue, where hope and despair come to loggerheads. The mammogram may either be a document of an impending battle or evidence of relief; where corporeal vulnerability conflicts with intangible, tenuous emotion. Makan employs the device of abstraction to explore this duality in *Mammogram*, a rendering of the x-ray image as a colour field that may be – at different times and for different people – either a universe of relief or a world falling apart.

Black appears as a significant colour for the first time, and from this dark silk organza emerges the shimmer of shredded golden ribbons. These are references to classical iconographies, where black is the embodiment of fear, ignorance and death, and gold symbolizes renewal, light and hope. In Makan's contemporary reading, the classical associations imbue the *Mammogram* with an additional significance as icon of the battle between psychologies in opposition.

Herein, within this tension of dialogue, is vested one of the work's greatest narrative powers.

It is also this dialogue that steers us – with incisive, directed intent – towards the two works that compose the next chapter of the chronicle.







Chains and Links I, 2015
H 70.5 x W 128 x D 2.8cm

KNOTS OF STRENGTH AND CAPTIVITY

Chains and Links are two delicate works of chain stitch on ribbon. Knots are evident where fibres join together. Rows of thread meander off the ends of the ribbons, trailing like a grammatical ellipse, as if to indicate something left unsaid, or possibly still to be said...

The implication of the trailing threads is continuity. There are multiple narrations, on the left and the right, within which the artwork becomes a proxy for a community formed by shared elements of experience, fact, emotion and journey.

The ribbon of *Chains and Links I* is a flat strip that continues with a linear but arrhythmic forward movement. In *Chains and Links II*, the ribbon crosses over itself to form a loop

of visual and functional strength. The flimsiness of I has been replaced, via a simple fold in II, with an air of determination. There appears to be a temporal and procedural link between the two artworks, as if the first, through animation, has become the second.

Links – the components of chains – are heavy and restrictive, an interpretation not given credence by the lightweight artwork material. Another meaning, in this context, is one that brings together millions of women with the commonality, writes Makan, that ‘continues to chain women but also to link us together’.

Whilst the first works in the series are more open to interpretation, with *Links and Chains* the artist draws on





Chains and Links II, 2015
H 70.5 x W 118 x D 2.8cm

familiar iconography of the ribbon. It functions to locate the project, unequivocally, within an awareness of and advocacy for breast cancer. It works as an icon of collaboration and co-operation – of strength in numbers – and it does so through the process of externalization. It states that ‘I am not alone’, and it seeks and garners peer support. It is a visual tool to indicate message and intention without the use of words. Its agency is vested within its firm, entrenched and accepted associations with both the gentle necessity for care and the transformative militancy of a battle that is historical, contemporary and ongoing, and which requires various troops, from across sectors and disciplines, to link together to effect real, significant and sustainable shifts.

The iconography of the pink ribbon is elevated to an even greater significance in the artwork

titled *Breast Cancer*. Using metallic and surgical thread, Makan stitched thousand of these iconic forms onto a garment designed by Vanessa Gounden. The ritual action of stitching became, for the artist, a process of both memorialization and celebration; a meditation on the simple difference between life and death.

The colour pink is a motif that begins with the first work in the series, and threads through to its conclusion in *Breast Cancer*. The contemporary iconography of the colour pink is steeped in the politics of contentious gender assignations, and has become associated with femininity, compassion, nurturing and love. In the process it became synonymous with breast cancer. However, pink is a derivative of the primary colour red, a fact that imbues the pale and softer tint with an iconography that has the power to invoke revolutionary shifts.



Masectomy/Hem, 2015
H 53.3 x W 33 x D 2.8cm

VIOLENT SPLICE

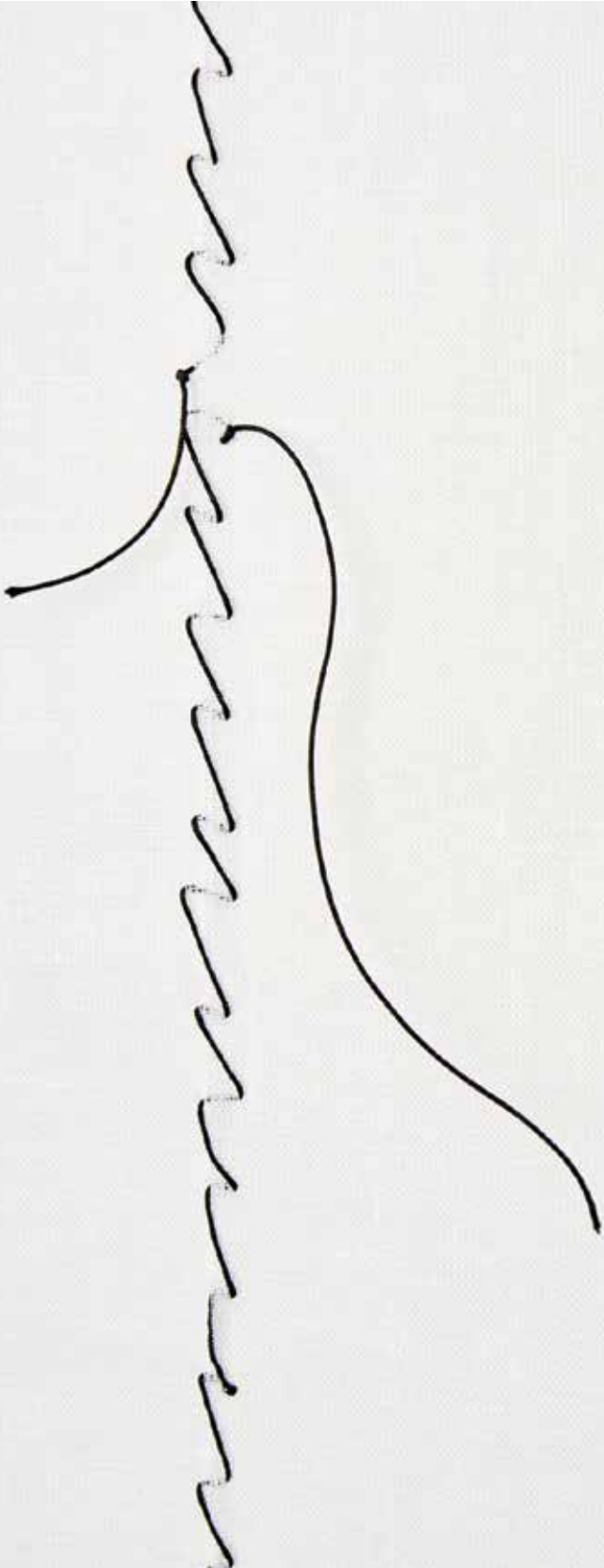
Surgery is, by nature, invasive: a medical procedure that breaches physical, psychological and often spiritual boundaries. A mastectomy is a particularly traumatic form of surgery, often avoidable through early procedures that are diagnostic and non-invasive, and which provide the basis for effective, non-surgical treatment.

Mastectomies are a form of radical emergency operation, often performed as soon as diagnosis confirms the presence of mid- or late-stage breast cancer. This sudden and unexpected shock has no time to be processed, and is exacerbated, after surgery, by a simultaneous mourning of the loss of a vital and visible part of the body.

The breast is a powerful symbol in contemporary societies and is linked, intrinsically, to sensuality, desirability, nurturing and femininity. The loss of a breast, or of both breasts, is thus accompanied by a seeming loss of aspects of being that are important in identity of the self, and of the self in relation to the surrounding world.

In *Mastectomy/Hem: Hem/Mastectomy*, the embroidery stitch manifests as a black surgical thread through a panel of white Indian cotton. The thread is thick and almost plastic, and meant to be tugged taught using the resistance of skin to close the wound. However, the cotton base of the artwork is too thin to allow the surgical thread to be tightened. The result of the juxtaposition of these incongruously mismatched materials is an ungainly fit. What was meant as a process of medical care has instead become, for the patient, cause of wounding.

The artwork title highlights this medical-psychological conundrum: the surgical process as simultaneously potential salvation and source of trauma. *Mastectomies* might arguably be as traumatic as the cancer they are meant to treat; and they should ideally be avoided. This is possible only through an increased, vigorous and sustained public health agenda of education and awareness linked to a paramedical programme of early screening, detection and non-surgical treatment. It is here, vested within an activist intent, that this artwork does its most significant work.





Diana Dress
(Fabric: Silk Cotton)





Couture Exhibition Collection Piece
(Fabric: Silk Cotton)



Couture Exhibition Collection Piece
(Fabric: Silk Cotton)



Ravaged Burrefly I, 2014
H 101 x W 102.5 x D 2.8cm

METAPHOR OF HOPE

It is often hope that drives the patient to continue with a treatment that may be debilitating on every level; it is often faith that drives the belief in a recovery that appears indistinct and unreachable. And once that nebulous point of recovery is within grasp, it is psychological strength that allows survivors to cope with the aftermath of the disease and its treatment.

Survival strategies, and their methodologies and applications, fluctuate according to the stages of disease, treatment, recovery and remission. Common is the need for adaptation and flexibility, and these shifts in perspective are key tools on a route

where impediments become opportunities for evolution. The two final artworks in the collection focus on this requirement.

Titled *Ravaged Butterfly I and II*, Makan returns to the metaphor as a visual and narrative device, where obsessive detailing renders broken wings as appendages for magical flight – where potential indicators of the broken and the abject become transformed into a luminous agency. The two-dimensional *Ravaged Butterfly I* is given depth by the application of metallic threads and Swarovski crystals, thereby creating the undulations necessary for flight.



Makarov



Ravaged Burrefly II, 2015
Tulle and Gauze strapless dress



Couture Exhibition Collection Piece
(Fabric: Lace with Satin Butterflies)



Couture Exhibition Collection Piece
(Fabric: Gold Lurex Satin with Embellishment)



Ravaged Butterfly II returns to the significance of surgical thread on medical gauze, given sculptural qualities through integration into a robe designed by Vanessa Gounden. In the same way that the garment titled *Breast Cancer* allowed the advocacy of the project to become part of the fabric of existence, so too does the sculpture titled *Ravaged Butterfly II* become an embodiment of the strategies of survival, where trauma becomes transformed into a life exemplified by courage and tenacity.



Couture Exhibition Collection Piece
(Fabric: Organza, Gauze and Lurex Netting with Satin Butterflies)





CONCLUSION

This essay concludes where it first began: with an expression of delight for narratives that are proximal and intimate; and which create interactive, immersive environments where passive, external observation (of being the reader, or the audience) is succeeded by an energizing, effective and ongoing engagement between the artwork and the participant.

Through her body of artwork, Amita Makan uses dramatic process and emotive tools to narrate an experience of breast cancer that, together with the other components of *A Stitch in Time*, ensures the project's structure exists in synchrony with its intent. The result is an immersive experience where the viewer/participant is able to adopt the activist principles of the project, and contribute to their realisation.

Finally, Makan's body of artwork – its sequencing and chaptering; the interplay between obsessive detail and minimal gesture; between quiet and loud, and between instrumental integrity and white noise – becomes, on exhibition and in association with the project's further components, a lyrical cadence that may be described as akin to the principles and strategies of symphonic composition. The conceptual and material structure to the body of work offers a metaphoric soundtrack to a project that uses the production and experience of art and of fashion as a medium for an activism designed, generated and applied with this mandate: to use the products of cultural imagination to advance the evolution of humanity via a sustainable network of public health.







KEY BIOGRAPHIES

VANESSA GOUNDEN

Vanessa grew up on a small farm in a mixed racial area near Durban, South Africa, with her grandparents and two other families. Under the apartheid government her family were forcibly moved to a dormitory township, this experience made an indelible impression on Vanessa and the awakening of her political consciousness.

Vanessa went on to become an activist gaining a university degree and later becoming a primary school teacher. When the ANC won power in 1994, both Vanessa and her husband, also an activist, received calls from the Mandela administration, requesting their assistance in the rebuilding of South Africa. Appointed as the director of change management in the South African police force, she later headed up human resources for the National Intelligence Agency and moved on to South African Airways (vice president customer relations).

In 2005, Vanessa and her husband, Sivi, joined their life savings launching their own company principally within the mining industry, HolGoun. Her experience, through her active involvement in one of the largest transformation projects

that the world has ever seen, equipped Vanessa to enter the world of business, which started from humble beginnings at a desk in her bedroom. HolGoun has grown into a multi-

million dollar corporate empire with interests spanning Mining, Healthcare, Financial Services, Lifestyle & Leisure, Property, Music and Movie Production.

Although her business interests have since grown substantially, Vanessa remains forever conscious of her roots. Vanessa is deeply involved in philanthropic activities, such as starting the HolGoun Development Trust which has educated over 100 underprivileged students over the last seven years. Vanessa also has donated money towards the provision of reading materials for children, as she remembers only too well what it was like to have no money for books as a child.

It is through books and the power of her imagination, that she was spurred on to aspire, believing that anything is possible. With her sights set firmly on her goals, she has achieved success within notoriously macho industries, growing an empire in under 10 years.

Having had a taste of the fashion world, Vanessa decided to expand her business portfolio and to take her passion a step further by setting up her eponymous fashion label; Vanessa Gounden in 2011. It was the natural progression for Vanessa to open a store in London with the brand continuing to grow

and as with her other ventures. Vanessa has now also completely vertically integrated her business and has empowered over 300 people directly and indirectly in the mostly mothballed manufacturing sector in South Africa and has over the last 3 years opened her own Atelier and print house.

Vanessa in 2014 received the Mbokodo Award from the South African Department of Arts and Culture for Design and Innovation in South Africa.

THE VANESSA GOUNDEN LABEL

Vanessa's signature style combines bold prints and patterns with innovative tailoring techniques, such as 3D layering. Her work is handcrafted in the finest luxurious fabrics and embellished with hand painted buttons, beading and embroidery. Vanessa designs her work for intelligent, glamorous, spirited women where classic styles endure over trends. Each collection centres around a concept that is close to Vanessa's heart, the narrative beautifully created on garments with such attention to detail, each piece retains its sense of bespoke individuality.

Given Vanessa's ebullient spirit, passion for social issues, love of art and innate creativity, it is unsurprising then that her signature prints are conceptual and challenging with each print an elaborate canvas to create awareness of social and political issues.

Vanessa combines original artworks and photography to create highly individual and contemporary prints. Her work is easily distinguished by its meticulous attention to detail and luxurious fabrics. Also signature to the brand and present in every collection is the Vanessa Trench, a coat dress cut with strong classic feminine silhouette.

With a strong sense of citizenship and responsibility, Vanessa is committed to uncover and sponsor new artists as well as train and employ craftsman, tailors and seamstresses in fine skills and pattern matching. Artistry and techniques already used in Vanessa Gounden creations have revived bygone textile skills and provided employment to local artisans not only in her South African based Atelier but in various parts of the world where unique talent is discovered and nurtured.

Atelier Vanessa Gounden also offers limited edition pieces and a bespoke service for individual clients.





AMITA MAKAN

Amita Makan is from South End, Port Elizabeth. She was born in 1967. She matriculated in 1985. She has a Bachelor of Arts (BA) Degree in English and Political Science (1989), a BA Honours (1990) and a Masters Degree (1993) in International Relations and Political Science from Rhodes University. She also completed a one-year course on the History of Art and Practical Application.

She worked as a Researcher at the University of Cape Town. In 1994 she was awarded a British Council Scholarship to study Gender Policy and Planning at the University College London. This research continued at the Human Sciences Research Council in 1998. With her husband, she moved to Switzerland in October 1998. She completed a one-year Cambridge diploma course in French. She

studied and worked with the artist, Fereshte Shishine, at her studio in Geneva until 2002.

Amita completed the first year of BA Fine Arts Degree at the University of Pretoria in 2003, and has followed up with several courses in oil painting, including an Advanced Art-making course at the Fried Contemporary Art Gallery, Pretoria, in November 2007.

In July 2010 she wrote two short stories Journey and An Unsung Hero for an anthology entitled Shared Histories: Struggles Remembered, edited by Vidya Bhandarker. Amita's mixed media work, Journey, appeared on the cover of the book, and a photograph of her monochromatic portrait of Nelson Mandela is featured in the book.

In September 2009, Amita received the Runner Up Award for the 2009 SASOL New Signatures National Art Competition. Her work, Loose Ends: A Story About My Mother was exhibited at the Pretoria Art Museum in September 2009.

In May 2010, Amita held her first solo exhibition, Evanescence at the KZNSA Gallery in Durban, and exhibited for the second time

at the Ron Belling Gallery, Port Elizabeth. In 2014, Amita's second solo exhibition titled Nomalungelo: Threads To Freedom, curated by Brenton Maart, was shown at Constitution Hill, Johannesburg, and thereafter at Webber Wentzel, Johannesburg. In addition, Amita has shown her work in numerous group exhibitions, internationally, more recently including I take it all back (Nirox Projects, 2014), France–South Africa Dialogues (Orangerie du Senat, Paris, 2013), EK/Me (Klein Karoo Nationale Kuns Festival, Outshoorn, 2013), Pointure (University of Johannesburg Art Gallery, 2012), and Imago Mundi (Giogio Cini Foundation, Venice Biennale 2015).

Amita's work is held in numerous public collections, including the International Convention Centre, Durban; Luciano Benetton Collection, Italy; Edoardo Villa Museum, University of Pretoria; University of KwaZulu-Natal; University of South Africa; University of Pretoria; and South African Reserve Bank.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A Stitch in Time
Artist: Amita Makan
Designer: Vanessa Gounden

Venue:
Vanessa Gounden Flagship Store
55a Conduit Street
Mayfair, London W1S 2YY

Exhibition
Curators: Vanessa Gounden
Melissa Digby-Bell
Jag Mehta
Coordinators: Anastasia Maimonis
Khumo Manota
Mehta Bell Projects

Catalogue
Essay: Brenton Maart
Photographs: James Fox (Artworks)
Damien Foxe (Main Collection)
Nicholas Santrucek (Couture)
Models: Rebecca Gobbi (Main Collection)
Geraldine Amoko (Couture)
Stylists: Damien Foxe (Main Collection)
Caelyn Gounden (Couture)
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