



Ninety – Victoria Stevens

my grandmother was a seamstress

my mother was a seamstress

I am a seamstress

This exhibition is a selection from my Master of Fine Arts installation of ninety individual textile works which are predominantly hand stitched. They represent each year my mother lived without her mother.

Ninety was my attempt to negotiate and record the construction of my identity as an individual living in contemporary New Zealand. New Zealand is a country of new arrivals, people who derive their sense of identity, their tribal roots, from different pathways – the waka migrations, the first four ships, post-war immigrant ships. I did not know my roots. *Ninety* is my journey toward identifying my tribe, seamstresses, and the power of inherited memory.

The pieces are constructed using different textile processes including Shibori, immersion and hand dyeing, solar printing, appliqué, and a variety of stitch and embroidery methods. In this fast moving digital age, the revival of interest in the handmade – slow, mindful, contemplative and labour intensive – encourages debate about the second class stature of handwork in relationship to the fine arts. My works apply traditional domestic skills, interpreting them in new ways to challenge the notion of what textiles can or should depict. Each piece is representational; while each stands alone to tell its own story, they come together as a multiple to tell a bigger story.

The series is cohesive, grounded in a palette of blue, which references the traditional practise of ‘blueing’ domestic laundry to make it appear new and fresh, defying the passing of time. The blue dye, applied uniquely to each piece, is a metaphor for how experiences strike a person, randomly and unexpected, creating a massive emotional catalogue and constructing personal identity. My experiments with these textiles, changing their shape and their colour, reflect that we are neither static, nor bound by our genetics. Every individual carries within us convoluted experiences, stories and backgrounds. How we elect to live and respond to our given circumstances is an essential link to my work.

The works are predominantly hand stitched, and refer to domestic traditions and rituals which women bring to the human experience. On first viewing the works manifest as a family album; literally as an interpretation of all things pleasant, as in warmth and closeness to others, but closer inspection reveals a sadness, a story of loss along with a deeply unsettling sense of foreboding.