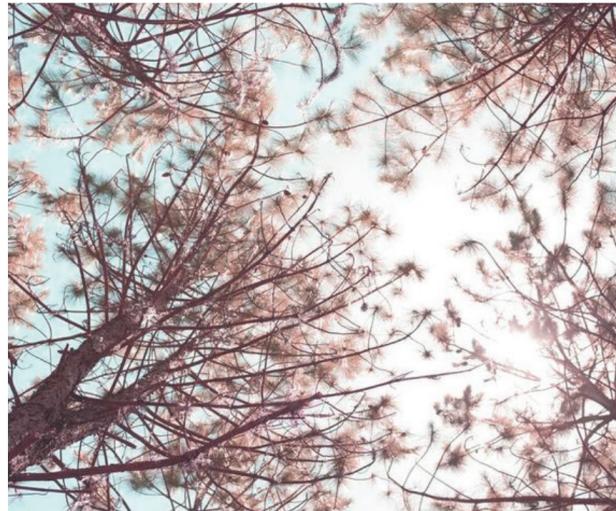


a modern look back

george cassavetis: WEARS

The Box
 www.theboxwestend.com
 29 Vulture St., West End, Brisbane
 4–7 April



BRISBANE IS NOT WITHOUT ARTISTIC FLAIR, BUT IT IS NOTORIOUS FOR PERIODICALLY BECOMING STAGNANT. TO HELP ARREST THIS TENDENCY, THE BOX HOSTS MUSIC, EXHIBITIONS, AND LAUNCHES. QUICKLY BECOMING A FAVOURITE SPACE AMONG THE LOCAL CREATIVE COMMUNITY, IT ALLOWS NEW PERSPECTIVES TO BREAK ONTO BRISBANE'S ARTS SCENE.

It is in this fresh and welcoming space that Alexandra Winters is curating *WEARS*, featuring the works of five local photographers who all articulate the broad theme of vintage culture but through very different methodologies.

WEARS is an exploration of textile, pattern, individual expression, and nostalgia that revels in all things vintage. What started as a marketing exercise for the aligned store Box Vintage, turned into a collaborative exhibition showcasing the works of five local photographers and introducing The Box art space to a new and inquisitive audience.

The small venue has a main gallery space at the entrance, which leads out to a bar and live entertainment area in the back. Those daunted upon first entry will be relieved to realise that this is not a stuffy gallery space filled with wine tasters and cheese platters. The eclectic mix of patrons, and local Brisbane band *Sawtooth* performing in the background (on opening night) brings the space to life and create an interesting juxtaposition to the silence of several of the art pieces.

In the centre of the space hang two sheets of translucent paper displaying the projected works of Hayley McGill and Tessa Fox. Exploring the concepts of nostalgia and tranquillity, both photographers capture a way of being that seems to have been lost.

In particular Hayley's works are displayed in several series of pairs, each exploring the relationship between humans and their environment in a calm and harmonious way. In one pair, a faded colour shot of sunlight peeking through a tree canopy is mated with a black and white photograph of a woman whose flowing hair has been caught by the wind. The common element of wind and the ability to react to it becomes the uniting factor, and a relationship between the human form and the forms of trees is discovered.

Another pair places a shot of a young man (seen from behind) at the entrance to a wooded forest alongside an aerial shot of a lively ocean making landfall. Both the young man and the waves reflect an environmental upset but not a destructive one: just as he enters the

woods as a visiting force, so does the ocean peak forward to the point of first contact. The waves will recede quietly, and we are led to believe that the same will occur in the woods.

This balance and harmony form the common thread in this body of Hayley's work, which focuses on the tranquillity of the way we used to be. Unavoidable, illuminated, and the only works *installed* rather than just displayed, these works almost become the central pillar of what is clearly the aspiration of the curator—to remind visitors of what was so special about the past.

On the right-facing wall hang six photographs of fabric-clad figures in various static poses. By covering these figures from head to toe, Gerwyn Davies celebrates vintage prints and textiles in a way that may surprise the viewer. Only when you notice that the six items of vintage (but standard) pieces of clothing that served as inspiration and have been placed beside the photographs do you realise that each photographed *costume* is in fact a single small item of clothing that has been photographed and then heavily edited to create the mummified figures.

An (apparently) male figure sits slumped on a rugged brick wall in a damp and gloomy landscape. A bright green knit swaths every inch of the figure's body,

except for two fingertips peeking out from a sleeve. This reminds the viewer that there actually is a person within; though it is the character and personality of the fabric that steals the spotlight. Heavy and encompassing, it seems to drag the wearer down. Gerwyn explains that, 'while it was a soft and loose material, it felt like such a sullen and brooding wet day, and so I imagined this thing sitting alone on top of a hill isolated and sulking.'

This isolated and downtrodden kind of mood is imparted immediately as the garment imposes its movement and feel upon the male figure hidden within. Gerwyn's work transforms identity through clothing; the dominance of one element over another creates an interesting balance when placed alongside Hayley's tranquil works.

When seeking inspiration and a theme for this exhibition, the organisers decided to look back through the history books, a frequent strategy for designers, artists, and photographers. Explorers of vintage cultures have always been tempted to focus on an era's kitsch and rely on it, however *WEARS* resists that urge, instead loosening the theme just enough to allow individual interpretation and exploration of underlying ideas. The result is a show that surprises and intrigues, allowing a more organic representation and digestion of the works.

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Nevertheless, the exhibition was conceived through a marketing campaign gone awry. At what point does marketing become worthy of being called 'art'? Unlike the commercial poster art of the past, such as the work of Toulouse Lautrec (think *Moulin Rouge*), *WEARS* seems to have extracted its art from an intention to sell and *markets* itself for what it is: an exploration born of a creative approach to marketing. Each individual must decide whether the art that I perceive to have been extracted exists and whether they represent a genuine collaboration between The Box, the gallery space, and Box Vintage, the store, or if it is simply a marriage of convenience.

The doors have closed on the *WEARS* exhibit but it is only the first of a series of planned collaborations with Box Vintage, artists, and the arts community. More information on future collaborations and exhibitions can be found on The Box website, www.theboxwestend.com. ■

Previous page:
 Hayley McGill, *Untitled* (Photograph) 2013, image courtesy of the artist.
Top:
 Hayley McGill, *Untitled* (Photograph) 2013, image courtesy of the artist.
Right:
 Gerwyn Davies, *Boundary St* (Digital Print) 2013, image courtesy of the artist.