

# PAPER ON SKIN



JANET DE BOER  
Wearable Art  
and Burnie, the  
Paper City

Leonie Oakes 2012  
*two small figures scrambled to their feet*  
category Betta Milk Open Award – screen  
printed Kozo paper, detail paper, letterpress.



'*paper on skin* connects Burnie's papermaking heritage to a community of international artists who embrace the challenge of designing a wearable garment made from at least 80% paper.

Art lovers from around the country travel to experience this showcase of spectacular wearables at the Gala Event and Award Evening held in June every two years since 2012.

The impact and appeal of this unique medium is reflected in the visceral audience response. *paper on skin* firmly establishes Burnie as a centre of cultural excellence. You will never take paper for granted again!

Lyndal Thorne, Vice President,  
Burnie Arts Council

Co-ordinator, *paper on skin* 2020

Burnie is a port city on the north-west coast of Tasmania which was once the home of the mighty APPM (Associated Pulp and Paper Mills) documented by Allan Jamieson who published the history of APPM and the mill in "The Pulp - The Rise and Fall of an Industry". Jamieson was also Chairman and Manager of Creative Paper Mills in Burnie, producing handmade paper, before this organisation was taken over by the Burnie City Council and relocated to the present site at Makers' Workshop. Interestingly, *paper on skin* 2020 will take place on the 10-year anniversary of the closure of the Pulp Mill.

Paper and Clothing – is that a real relationship or an artistic construct? It was in fact Allan Jamieson who pointed out to me that 'clothing was commonly made from paper in the second half of the 19th Century as a result of technical advances in papermaking during the 1850s, which suddenly made paper much cheaper to manufacture, and – as a consequence – all manner of other things were made from paper as well...' So here we have advancements in the product but where does Art enter? And when does it go on the catwalk?

My friend Inga Hunter, a well known paper maker, once commented, 'You can make paper look like ANYTHING! It's wonderful that way.' The notion of paper's transforming qualities for wearables was explored in Burnie some years ago when a Paper Dress Competition was initiated through

Above and opposite:

Douglas McManus, winner 2012 Betta Milk Open Award entitled 'synthetique of bone & matter; blossfelt & mcqueen' Laser cut and engraved rice paper; screenprinted foil on rice paper.

the Burnie City Council's Youth Development program. This concept is currently being re-invigorated through a new BCC Community Paper Clothing Competition described by Lyndal Thorne as 'a mentoring opportunity and skills-building incubator for future *paper on skin* entries'. Young artists seem to have endless ideas; their ability to understand and transform paper in aid of these ideas is indeed the challenge.

The internet hosts vast numbers of images of clothing made from handmade paper; some of the garments are very lavish and intricate indeed. While the forms are often astonishing, the question remains, is it very clever or is it transformative art? The more I learned and observed, encouraged by the relationship with Burnie, the more I felt assured that paper can be integral to wearables in all kinds of ways including some astonishing art.

Early in 2012 I was contacted by Greg Leong who at that time was the Director of Burnie Regional Art Gallery (BRAG), and wanted to let me know about the inaugural *paper on skin* competition and award night so I could help publicize it and possibly attend. Pam Thorne, justifiably, gets a lot of credit for the initial concept. She was Project Co-ordinator for the Burnie Arts Council for *paper on skin* 2012 and worked hard to inspire others to join her in developing the idea of art wearables made from paper – which came to include major sponsorship from Betta Milk Co-op Society Ltd.

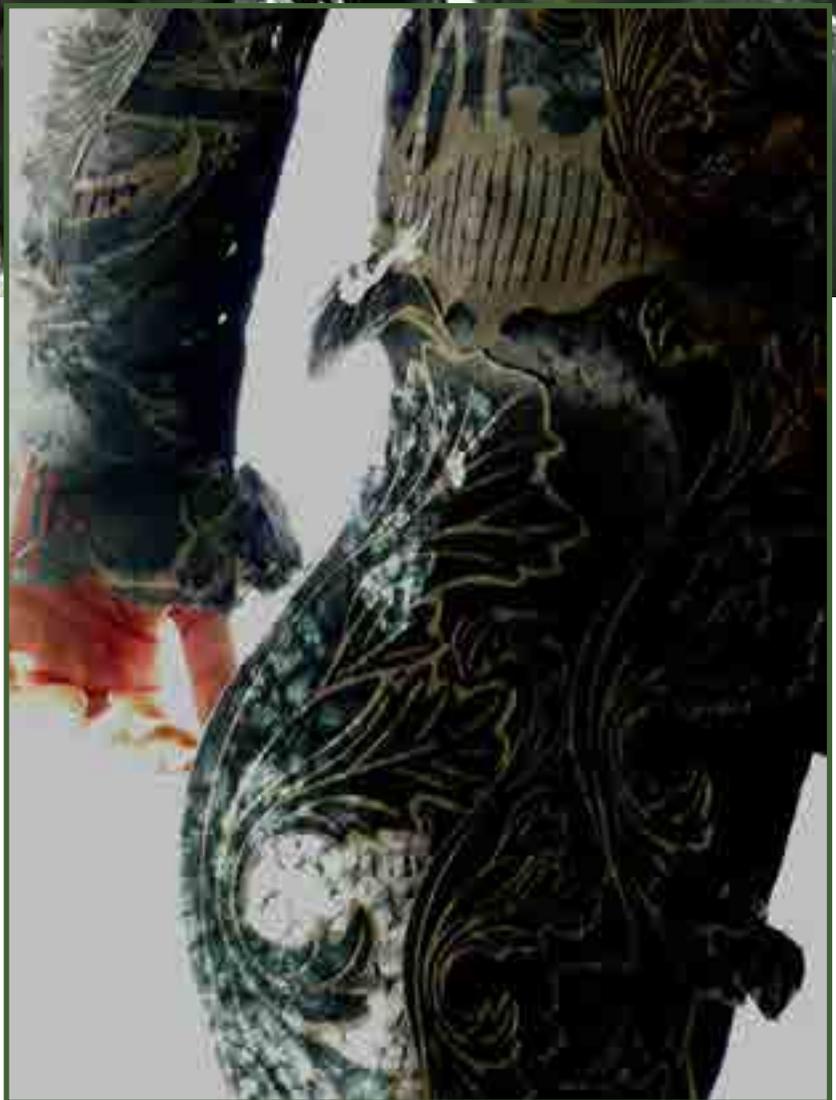
It's hard to keep me away from a gala or a catwalk, and I was encouraged by Larissa Murdock of Victoria, a self-confessed wearable art tragic, to join her in Burnie in June of 2012 as she had had a work selected for the Gala Parade



Award Evening. I was outfitted by the Papermakers of Queensland (special thanks to Di Tait and Helga Hill) in a headpiece and full length handmade paper kaftan and my jewellery, also made from paper, was created by Gail Stiffe and Tricia Alexander from the Papermakers of Victoria. They have had many outings since.

Thanks to this opportunity I not only had tremendous fun but I got to know the city of Burnie, including the very impressive Makers' Workshop. Pam Thorne along with Ruth Rees created many life-size figures from papier mache that continue to be a special feature of Makers' Workshop as are the café, art gallery, gift shop and of course, the makers - and Australia's largest handmade paper mill, Creative Paper Tasmania.

Larissa Murdock was also selected for *paper on skin* 2018 for which I was a judge along with Jane Haley, CEO of *Ten Days on the Island* and Niecy Brown, Initiating Manager





and Creative Director at Creative Paper Mills, Burnie. This fourth iteration of the competition was characterized by serious milestones as Lyndal Thorne confirms: international entrants, the exceptionally high standard of entries, depth of understanding the medium (innovation re: use of paper) and a weekend workshop at Makers' Workshop and its world standard papermaking studio, Creative Paper Tasmania with Aimee Lee, based in the USA and a renowned artist and papermaking specialist.

In 2020, for which expressions of interest are now invited, there is an increased Prize Pool (to \$10,000) with several new awards. The Gala Evening, where all accepted works are paraded, will move to a larger venue at Burnie Town Hall for what is planned as 'an immersive multi-sensory event.' As well, Professor Mary Hark from the University of Wisconsin-Madison will be the tutor for the weekend workshop being held at Creative Paper Tasmania on 20/21 June (paperonskin@gmail.com).

Burnie Regional Art Gallery has a key role to play as they are in a position to acquire some of the works entered in *paper on skin* and schedule concurrent biennial exhibitions so garments can be available for five weeks of viewing by the public.

In 2018, Burnie City Council's newly formed Special Events Working Group selected *paper on skin* as the number one event to encourage visitation to the city.

That's the formal journey. Now let me indulge in a personal journey. Paper as Art – Wearables as Art. What are some of the works that heightened my conviction and informed my judgements? The logical starting place is 2012 in Burnie. That year there was a Prize Pool of \$5000 shared by Douglas McManus, already renowned for his creative use of laser-cutting, and Leonie Oakes for whom a key focus was using the book visually, as a vehicle to express the self and the female body.

Both the major works submitted by Leonie Oakes exemplify her notion 'that traumatic experience can manifest internally and physically emerge like a hidden text unfolding'. She creates books as sculpture, as wearable objects, 'as props, as images and as vehicles for the stories

This page:

Leonie Oakes 2012 winner Sustainable Fashion Award, *paper on skin with shadows that are their nightgowns* ephemera, maps, antique onion skin book pages, letterpress, shellac and dye

Opposite:

*Tahuna: Ocean Navigator*, 2016 winner Betta Milk Major Award, Liz Powell, Denise N. Rall, Kath Wilkinson

Sketch by Kath Wilkinson of the under-dress, main image is costume in the Burnie Regional Art Gallery (photo Grant Wells)





*Handwritten signature* 11

we all hold. My work often reveals a fragmented and broken narrative, giving glimpses of the past rather than a full disclosure of the actual story.'

My feeling was that both McManus and Oakes exemplified great skill in making and knew what they were about visually. I was particularly drawn to Oakes' *two small figures scrambled to their feet* due to its strong sculptural shapes and sumptuous colouring. Moreover, the need for the work to be created chiefly from paper, and not some other material, shines through.

I have been fortunate as both guest and judge of *paper on skin* to be able to examine works in detail. While the impact on the catwalk confirms a piece is in fact wearable (and we are not going to worry about what event it might appropriately be worn for) it is vital to study works closely, to appreciate the detail and how paper is integral to the artistic statement and the validity of the worn garment or costume. The concurrent

exhibitions at BRAG over the years give the viewing public this much valued option.

*Tahuna: Ocean Navigator*, the 2016 winner of the Betta Milk Major Award was acquired by Burnie Regional Art Gallery and was unique to the competition for being a collaborative entry from artists Liz Powell, Dr. Denise N. Rall and Kath Wilkinson. Not only was *Tahuna* impressive when

Left: Svenja: *Lichen Morphology* draws on my years of fascination with fungus and lichen, as well as my many experimentations using textiles to explore their textures and forms. Lichen slowly and subtly cloaks nature with incredibly delicate forms, enfolding and encrusting branches with a layer of fine decoration. Graceful, ethereal, sculptural, *Lichen Morphology* transposes the slow-growing decoration of nature onto the human body for a moment. A wire, lace, and tulle armature is covered in papier mache - some beading texture subtly comes through. Silk paper 'lichen' are made with gummy silk cocoon strippings, and texture is created with free motion embroidery.



fully assembled but I felt that each individual garment section, embossed and embellished, seemed to hold an artistic strength of its own. As well the garment concept had a direct link to Tasmania through reference to wind, sails and sea. These kinds of ideas need a dynamic interpretation within the framework of the body, along with a way to simply hold all the ideas together.

Both Kath Wilkinson and Larissa Murdock again submitted design concepts for *paper on skin* 2018 and each was accepted - which is something of an award in itself. Artists are given a due date to submit a Design Concept, Sketches and an Artist Statement along with a CV and some examples of previous works. Obviously their conceptual concerns needed to be convincing when imagined in paper and garment form. Murdock was inspired by her longing for strong colours, and her daughter's Siamese fighting fish and 'his luminous light fragile nature'.

When Kath Wilkinson made her submission she included an image of *Arthropoda* as an example of her creative abilities with wearables. While paper as a material has no special significance here - her technique involved machine embroidering on lace - she was inspired by cobwebs and insects, employed to such good effect in the evening gown *Arthropoda*, that it was selected as a finalist for the highly prestigious 'Powerhouse Museum International Lace for Fashion Awards' (July - Oct 2000).

For *paper on skin* 2018 there was a wish to revisit insects, in this case beetles, and a multi-layered garment was entered, showing the symbiotic relationship between beetles and fungi, specifically 'the pleasing fungi beetles and their link with ghost fungi... I like to explore making things beautiful that many people find repulsive or frightening'.

Works comprised of several sections mean careful handling is needed in the Packing Room, a venue that provides a rare chance for judges to see individual garment sections in detail. Artists really can't help themselves; their audience may never see some of the aspects of these details yet the work has to be perfectly composed. It's likely the 'hand modelled papier mache beetles positioned at the closure points on the back' weren't visible when *Liaison Symbiotic* was paraded but they were important to the artist's notion of nature and the often overlooked - as well as her own inner drive for completeness.

The winner of the 2018 Friends of the Regional Gallery Runner-Up Award, Polly Crowden, diverged completely from nature and gave a nudge to costume with *Adair of Aberlorne*. Her starting point was 'the female protagonist, embodying the spirit of a warrior'. Paper - a relatively 'soft' medium, made to look like elegant body armour...



Kath Wilkinson: *Liaison Symbiotic*  
photo Grant Wells. Detail knitted  
paper lace underdress and the 'fungi'  
gills before they were coloured.

Below: Polly Crowden Regional  
Gallery Runner Up Award 2018.  
Photo Grant Wells  
*Adair of Aberlorne* explores the  
female protagonist, embodying  
the spirit of a warrior. 'The  
application of papier mache over  
a dress mannequin allowed me  
to create the bodice armor in a  
seamless manner and through the  
experimentation with handmade  
paper; the idea for the diamond  
cape was born. In Runes, the diamond  
shape represents The Fertility God,  
meaning 'the fire within'. I feel this  
works well the theme of the female  
warrior, as it is the fire within that  
gives her the strength and courage  
she needs to survive.'





it feels logical to discover that Polly is currently a Costume Standby Assistant for Film and TV. Polly was asked what all this has meant to a young woman of 32 (age 30 when she received the award). It was a strong field in 2018; many well conceived and very assured works were submitted. They ranged from exceedingly elaborate to powerfully expressive to simple and stunning directness.

Svenja received the \$5000 Betta Milk Major Award for *Lichen Morphology*. Like Kath Wilkinson, Svenja is intrigued by fungi but takes that notion in a whole different direction, influenced by lichen as well and aiming for a very different method of constructing a wearable.

Svenja knew she wanted to use 'silk paper' as her chief material and cleared this with the competition before going ahead with her piece. Yes, it was acceptable. Silk fibres can be bound together to create sheets of paper albeit in a different way from the binding of cellulose fibres.

In December 2019 Svenja further indulged her fascination for all things Tasmanian by taking up a one-month residency on King Island to work on a project titled *Algalrhythms*. She is excited about this unique opportunity to explore bull kelp 'as a material in itself'.

While this may provide her an opportunity to shift her own focus towards 'creating stand alone sculptural work, low relief panels, and installations whilst continuing to utilise and expand the techniques and materials I have become experienced in', she is also looking forward to the opportunity to introduce the King Island community to both the traditional techniques and modern methods involved in creating works of wearable art, part of her residency brief.

This page: Leonie Oakes 2012  
*two small figures scrambled to their feet*  
Submitted in the Betta Milk Open Award category – made from screen printed Kozo paper, detail paper; letterpress.



LARISSA MURDOCK (2018)  
photo Grant Wells  
Title: *Water Butterfly*:  
I had relocated to Melbourne which I find very drab (after Brisbane) and I craved to be surrounded by colour. I brightened my working palette with vibrant colours and applied them to my inspiration, Freckles, my daughter's Siamese fighting fish. He lives on my desk and I was drawn to his luminous light fragile nature. His graceful manner, delicate movements and cheerful colours became my inspiration. Fish symbolise rebirth and transformation and this was the journey I took during the creation of *Water Butterfly*, working out of my comfort zone in many aspects.  
Left: Indonesian paper with watermarks of puppet figures used in Janet De Boer's kaftan.



Entry forms for submissions for *paper on skin* 2020 are now available from [www.burnieartscouncil.com](http://www.burnieartscouncil.com) at the *paper on skin* page or [paperonskin@gmail.com](mailto:paperonskin@gmail.com)

Besides that level of commitment, many other opportunities exist to experience the whole event including the superb Gala opening (all hail the refreshments committee), Burnie Regional Art Gallery, Makers' Workshop, even a gin distillery. Creative tourism with a great deal of heart.

Janet De Boer



Left: Janet De Boer was guest of the inaugural *paper on skin* in Burnie, 2012. Full length kaftan of handmade paper, lined with interfacing (detail of the kaftan fabric on previous page featured watermarks of Indonesian shadow puppet figures). Makers Di Tait and Helga Hill from The Papermakers of Queensland. Paper jewellery made by Gail Stiffe and Tricia Alexander (courtesy The Papermakers of Victoria).