

R.R. Pascoe

This is The Pyrocene, 2020
approx 450 m of hemp braid,
hand pleated and sculpted, with
salvaged upholstery trimming
sample swatch mask and
embellishments
Photo R.R. Pascoe

Right:
Rose By Any Other Name, 2019
Self portrait and wearable art
created for Flora Sensa exhibition



R.R. PASCOE

Material Metamorphosis

Janet De Boer OAM

When reviewing my notes from 2018, jotted down while doing media research on wearable art, I found I had written: 'I am a resolute fan of Rosie Pascoe and was not surprised when she received the International Award (Australia and South Pacific Region) in 2017 for *Mollusca*, included in the renowned World of WearableArt (WOW) Award Show and Competition in Wellington, New Zealand. It works on every level.' As for her *Absinthium*, entered in WOW's 2018 competition, it received the same award, not surprisingly – new judges but the same recognition of excellence. She used monofilament thread to



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Undulata, 2019
 Approx. 600m
 hemp braid,
 jinsin buntal and
 silk thread, hand
 pleated and
 sculpted
 Finalist garment
 pictured onstage
 at the 2019
 World of
 WearableArt
 awards
 Photo World of
 WearableArt Ltd



Mollusca, 2017
 Approx. 300m
 hemp braid, hand
 pleated and sculpted,
 International award-
 winning garment
 (Australia and Pacific
 region) 2017 World
 of WearableArt
 Awards
 Photo World of
 WearableArt Ltd



meticulously join up masses of hemp braid, often employed by milliners as an edging, to form a garment which she says was 'inspired by the fabled hallucinogenic properties of the wormwood plant'.

Interestingly, Mollusca, which took roughly three months 'of sewing, sculpting and squinting!' to make, needed 300 linear metres of the preferred millinery braid, while the more ambitious Absinthium used up 500 linear meters of this specialized 12mm wide braid that Pascoe sews together with an invisible thread to provide her with a 24mm wide strip as her basic working unit. She admits to being 'paranoid about my finish' and this perfectionism becomes part of the final convincing aesthetic of her ensembles.



These elegant and very sculptural wearables were entered in WOW's Avant-Garde Section as was her 2019 entry, Undulata which was retained by the National World of WearableArt & Classic Car Museum, Nelson New Zealand, for a period of 18 months. Mollusca and Absinthium were both acquired by the National WOW Museum and are included in the permanent historical collection. (It should be noted that with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, only the Classic Car aspect of the museum in Nelson has continued for now, and the 2020 WOW Award Show and Competition was cancelled, although it is now set to run in Wellington from 30 September – 17 October, 2021.)

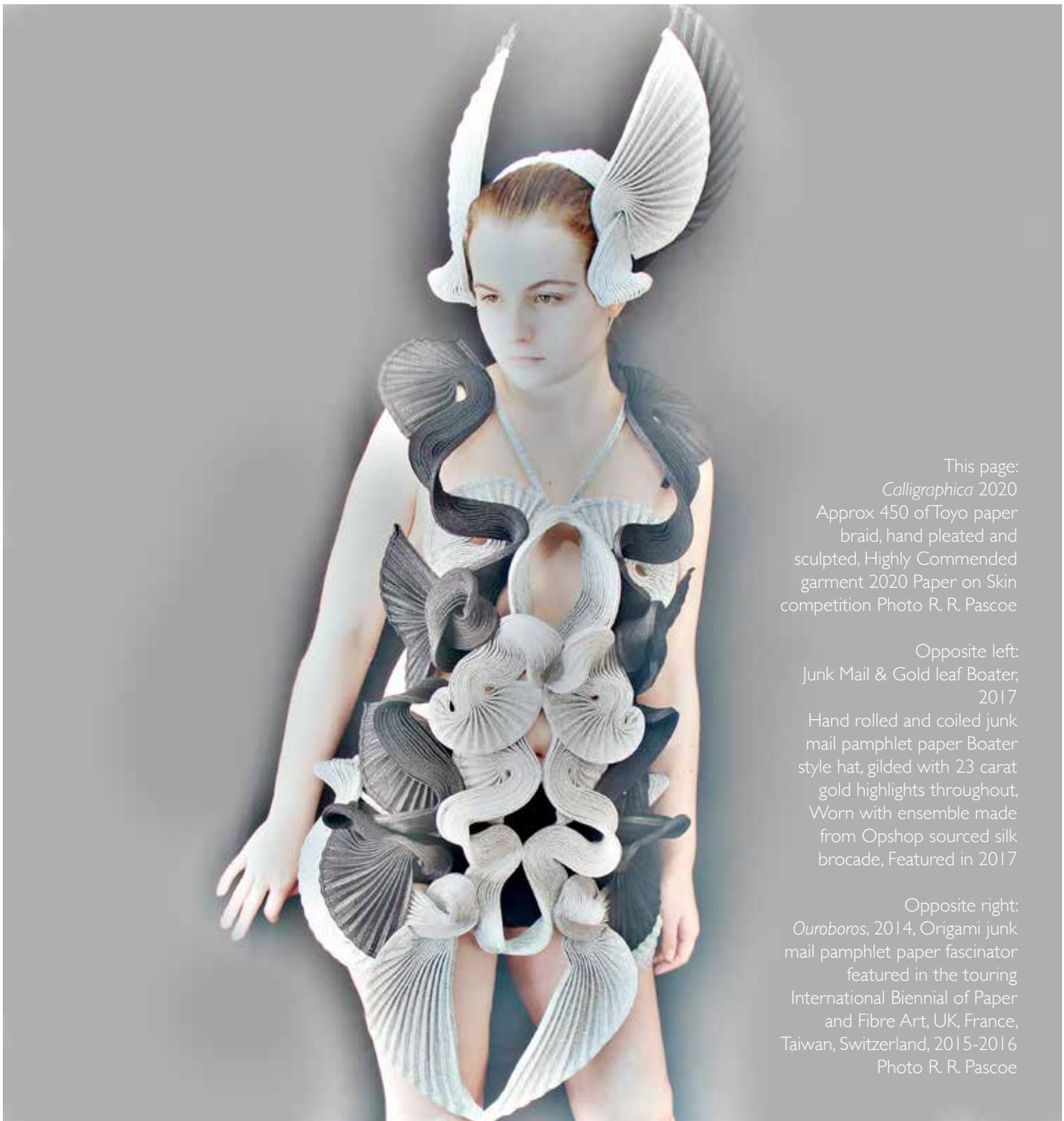
Just to become a finalist, and have your work included in the WOW



Absinthium 2018
Approx 500 m of Zoria
hemp braid, hand pleated and
sculpted, International award
winning garment (Australia
and Pacific region) 2018 World
of WearableArt (WoW)
AwardsPhoto World of
WearableArt Ltd

Opposite top and this page:
Calligraphica 2020 approx
450 m of Toyo paper braid,
hand pleated and sculpted
Highly Commended in
the 2020 Paper on Skin
competition
Photo Grant Wells





This page:
Calligraphica 2020
 Approx 450 of Toyo paper
 braid, hand pleated and
 sculpted, Highly Commended
 garment 2020 Paper on Skin
 competition Photo R. R. Pascoe

Opposite left:
 Junk Mail & Gold leaf Boater,
 2017
 Hand rolled and coiled junk
 mail pamphlet paper Boater
 style hat, gilded with 23 carat
 gold highlights throughout,
 Worn with ensemble made
 from Opshop sourced silk
 brocade, Featured in 2017

Opposite right:
Ouroboros, 2014, Origami junk
 mail pamphlet paper fascinator
 featured in the touring
 International Biennial of Paper
 and Fibre Art, UK, France,
 Taiwan, Switzerland, 2015-2016
 Photo R. R. Pascoe

Award Show and Competition, is a considerable honour. The finalist garments are presented in a spectacular stage show held over two weeks in Wellington, New Zealand attracting an audience of around 60,000 people who gather to be astonished by entries from all over the world. To take out prizes in the first two years of entering is truly a career benchmark and Pascoe acknowledges how significant this achievement was for her. 'In the delirium of all the last minute, late night, deadline crunching, desperation

and disillusioned moments, the second the lights hit your work on stage, it all becomes SO worth it.'

My observation was that her many years of making and designing put Rosie Pascoe at the top of her game and that was recognized in works unique to the WOW canon.

This pendant for Art Deco-styled wearable art, sculpted from pleated millinery braid, resulted as well

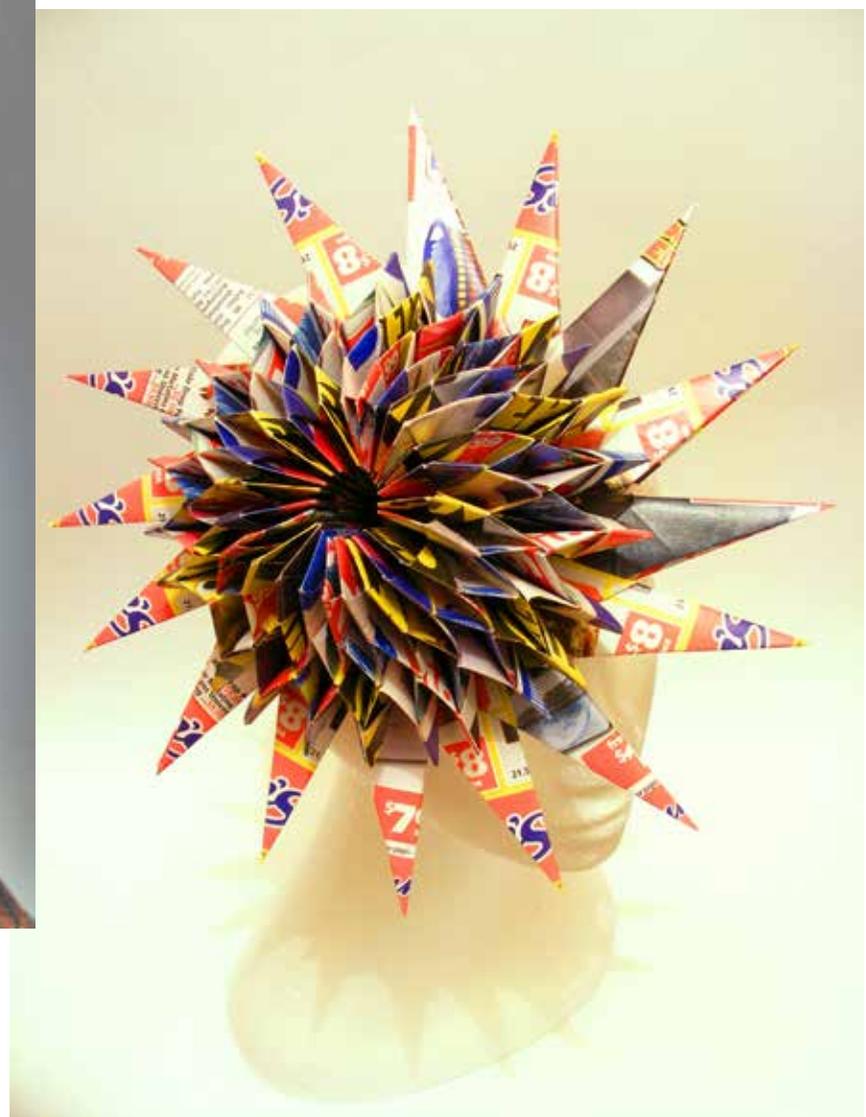
in an Honourable Mention for Pascoe's Calligraphica in the 2020 'Design Eye Creative Paper on Skin' competition held biennially in Burnie, Tasmania. The successful wearables were displayed in the Burnie Art Gallery but, due to Covid-19, could not be performed so were presented online. Rosie admits to an undying love of the 1920s and 30s aesthetics including the work of sculptor and fashion designer Erte - and it seems possible that the Art Deco influences of the Blue Mountains, where she and her family have deep roots, may also have been at work.

I have an on-going connection with Burnie's 10-year wearable art history and an even longer one with The World of WearableArt which I first encountered

in 1998 when I was asked to be a judge. My fascination endured as WOW took over the world and I was present in Wellington's TSB Arena for all three of the years that Pascoe has entered (2017-2019). But my first encounter with her work was in 2004 when I was invited to be a compere for Carolynne Skinner's initiative, 'Chill Out', held in the Blue Mountains. Naturally Pascoe had a stunning entry, Erte Inspiration, which included a horned headpiece and fishtail dress made from salvaged curtains. She confirms that 90% of her work overall is from sustainable and waste materials.

As Pascoe's website confirms, she is largely self taught and best known for her 'wearable artworks utilizing found objects and waste materials'. She is passionate about spotlighting the heedless waste that characterizes so much of the fashion industry, its 'notions of obsolescence and the commodification of self and identity'. A commitment to caring for the planet, including conservation, has long been part of her existence.

'I speculate that I may have pursued somewhat different pathways, namely in more socio-political





Right: Soup Tin Necklace,
Digitally printed allupanel, 2017
Photo R.R. Pascoe

Below: Soup Tin Collection, Accessories
collection featuring Homebrand
soup tin motif
Photo R.R. Pascoe 2019



Opposite page:
Top left:
Toyo Paper Mask, 2019, Toyo paper
braid, hand pleated and sculpted
Photo R.R. Pascoe 2019

Top right & below right:
Welwitschia (Platypus of the Plant
Kingdom), 2018, Hemp braid, crystal,
hand pleated and sculpted, Featured
headpiece in London Hat Week's
official 2019 Great Hat Exhibition:
World Garden
Photo R. R. Pascoe

Below left:
Sackrilege, 2012 Salvaged superfine
pure cashmere, merino and llama
suing sample fabric lined and
trimmed potato sack gown with
faux fur and potato sack muff
Highly Commended garment
pictured onstage at the 2012
Alice Springs Wearable Art
Awards
Photo Oliver Eclipse



fields, however the arts have become my avenue for expressing these viewpoints and various social commentaries, and has ended up being one of the only ways I have managed to stay at least partially connected and visible as a person who is largely house-, and often bed-bound' (due to a chronic illness, present since childhood). 'I always say how glad I am that my work can travel, even when I can't.'

Pascoe grew up 'in the heady hyper-consumerist 1980s' and was always very uncomfortable 'with the competing desires to create but not contribute to the environmental vandalism of perpetual growth capitalism'. She made an early bid for independence and lived for several years in share houses with older people. 'All were artists of some description - graffiti artists, musicians, electronic music producers, performance artists, sculptors, props builders and set designers.' It was through these connections that she was introduced to the underground electronic dance party culture that was thriving in Sydney and surrounds during this time 'which I fell happily into'.

Inspired, she moved to Sydney in 1997 to immerse herself in the vibrant and dynamic scene which was then in full swing. This burgeoning dance party culture was rooted deeply in the protest movements of the time, using events as a means of reclaiming public spaces through the creation of Temporary Autonomous Zones, drawing attention to social and environmental issues, and upholding punk principles through its commitment to the inherently egalitarian ethos of DIY culture. Pascoe still considers this important period in Sydney's history as being integral to her artistic development and philosophy.

From 1998-2000 Pascoe lived in the Classic Sportswear Factory on Cleveland Street in Redfern, Sydney which, in addition to being a fully functioning sportswear factory 'also housed two floors of artists' dwellings and studios, where I lived with, and met, many wildly inspirational and talented individuals... Living in a building with an endless supply of textile offcuts and discarded curiosities on offer in the factory's bin room from week to week, just made it that much more of a creative wonderland'. Pascoe also credits Marrickville's great institution, 'Reverse Garbage' as a source of materials that she turned into amazing costumes and extravagant décor.

Along with creating her assemblages from found objects, Pascoe was assisting with the often



chaotic tasks involved with the development and coordination of these subversive and often illegal events. This could include promotion, décor, bumping-in and out and even performances. In 1999 she was Coordinator and Curator for CryptoMendian Nightclub and Community Arts Space Sydney – a fortnightly club night that was 'a collaboration between myself and a longtime friend, creating a space to showcase visual art, installations, community arts and experimental music'.

Her daughter Olive was born in 2001 and by then Pascoe was living back in the Blue Mountains, 'slowing down significantly for the early years of Olive's life'. When she resumed a regular arts practice it was in very different surrounds, and from 2011 included working as an Arts Educator, developing and delivering workshops and classes in sustainable fashion and costuming skills, sharing her passionate belief that 'restrictions push creativity' and noting that, for young people in particular '...these classes act to help develop valuable problem solving skills and adaptability...'. It was a philosophical and creative fit.

In 2012, I brought an event called ContextART to the Blue Mountains, offering many workshops from Australian and overseas artists, and this is when I met Rosie Pascoe in a real sense. I was seriously impressed by her very assured and unorthodox aesthetic and through TAFTA (The Australian Forum for Textile Arts, for which I was the CEO) we were able to provide her with recognition including prizes, bursaries and selection into CTAF exhibitions. I sometimes think I invited Eugenie van Oirschot, designer and maker of architectural 'hat' masterpieces, to come to Australia from The Netherlands just so Rosie Pascoe could study millinery with her.

Truth be told, I learned of Eugenie through Waltraud Reiner, who I also invited to come from Melbourne to be part of ContextART – Rosie acknowledges the important influence each had on her. It was through this exposure that she learned the potential of the millinery hemp that she has put to such dynamic use as an element in her sustainable yet very dynamic headwear which now includes masks – although they were conceived before Covid-19.

It was during the ContextART years (2012-2014 for me – then managed by Vanessa Taylor from 2015-2017) that I was gifted my all-important 'muff' by Rosie Pascoe. As a Queenslander I suffer badly from chill



Anthropocene, 2016
 Photomontage on show during
 the Women Eco Artist Dialog
 members' show Reclaiming Earth,
 San Francisco Public Library's
 Jewett Gallery, San Francisco, 2017
 and Artstreet Katoomba 2017
 Photo WEAD 2017



Untitled, 2012
 Assemblage, Exhibited at the Women
 Ecortist Dialog members' show,
 Emotional Numbness: The impact of war on
 the human psyche and ecosystems,
 Platform 3 Gallery, Tehran, Iran, 2020
 Photo R.R. Pascoe 2012





Undulata, 2019
Approx 600 m of hemp braid, jinsin buntal, and silk thread, hand pleated and sculpted Finalist garment, pictured onstage at the 2019 World of Wearable Art Awards
Photo World of WearableArt Ltd

Inset:
Absinthium, 2018
Approx 500 m of Zoria hemp braid, hand pleated and sculpted, International award winning garment (Australia and Pacific region) pictured onstage at the 2018 World of WearableArt (WoW) Awards
Photo World of WearableArt Ltd



winds and when I travel I am devoted to my muff, created from a potato sack lined with faux fur. This is an item first designed by Pascoe in 2012 for the Alice Springs Wearable Art Awards. It accompanied her entry, Sackrilege, basically a potato sack gown made glamorous by the use of salvaged superfine pure cashmere, merino and llama suiting sample fabric for the lining and trimmings. It won a Highly Commended award and went on to feature in the Henty Natural Fibre Awards of 2013, held in the rural town of Henty, NSW.

Creating and sculpting with coiled paper is something Pascoe explored for several years until her hands suffered too much. During this era, she set herself the task of collecting all the junk mail she received for six months and then using every bit of it to create headwear, jewellery, even garments. A trio of headpieces (Torus, Breton and Crown) was accepted for the Wearable Expressions 7th International Juried Exhibition in Palos Verdes, California. These were inspired in part 'by the aesthetics of the Chinese Opera, the Vamps of the Art Deco era, Sacred Geometry and classic children's dress hats'. As ever she was determined to draw attention to 'the refuse

Below left & centre:
Logo Jewellery set in brass and
hemp braid ensemble
Photo R.R. Pascoe 2019

Below right:
Sample Swatch Mask, 2018
Salvaged upholstery trimming sample
swatches and broken jewellery components
Photo R.R. Pascoe 2019

of our consumerist landscape'. Her materials included paper that was rolled, coiled and sealed, along with 23 carat gold leaf.

A boater style hat in this same technique was selected for the 2017 Melbourne International Millinery Competition and her paper junk mail origami fascinator Ouroboros was chosen for the International Biennial of Paper and Fibre Arts: UK, France, Taiwan and Switzerland (2015-2016). As well, Pascoe entered successfully in three London Hat Weeks' Great Hat Exhibitions (2016-2019). 'Milliners submit pieces for selection based on a yearly theme. Each year approximately 30 from the total of 200-300 exhibited hats are chosen for a special press preview event prior to the exhibition, and in all of the three years I exhibited my hat was chosen to be featured at this special event. In 2019, 'World Garden' was the theme and Welwitschia (described by Darwin as the 'Platypus of the Plant Kingdom') was created from hemp braid, monofilament thread and crystal. Her inspiration came from Namibia where welwitschia grows in the desert and is the country's national plant.

A very different conceptual approach led to Home Brand is a Good Brand, an homage 'to Australia's internalised inferiority complex, the cultural cringe and inspired by Philip Treacy's 2003 Warhol collection'. It is made from digitally printed allupanel and was selected for the 2018 London Hat Week's official Great Hat Exhibition.

Photomontage is another of Pascoe's pursuits and the work Anthropocene was shown in WEAD (Women



Eco Arts Dialog) members' show, Reclaiming Earth, San Francisco Public Library's Jewett Gallery, San Francisco, 2017; and again in the Artstreet exhibition, Katoomba, 2017. Pascoe had seen an open call for the San Francisco show and looked further into the organization, becoming a member in 2016 'based on their similar eco feminist ethos'. Currently she has another assemblage showing in a WEAD exhibition in Iran, in the Platform 3 Gallery, Tehran: Emotional Numbness: The impact of war on the human psyche and ecosystems, also to be found online until the end of 2021.

While the past has been famously referred to as a foreign country, in this 'Covid-19' era, the future is surely even more foreign. I anticipate that Pascoe will continue to juggle necessary administrative chores with making her obsessively lovely and fully conceived ensembles and accessories, using her living room as her studio. For the past 2-3 years she has been really drawn to making masks. There has been a huge trend for masks, mask-wearing and the anonymity they bring, as a reaction to the saturation of selfie culture, which had been building in recent years and by the end of 2019 had really pushed through from wearable art into high fashion, and then lo and behold Covid arrives! Masks are currently omnipresent and to be honest, personally, now risk feeling a bit passé!

Undertaking a research and development project in digital design and fabrication techniques including experimental 3D machine knitting is being planned as a way of creating pathways forward that ensure the continuation of Pascoe's art practice into the future despite her physical needs increasing. The endless search for money, the impact of illness and the toll that making has taken on her body are influences that cannot be ignored. As well, not every exhibiting

Your Shit is My Chanel, 2015
 Origami junkmail pamphlet paper headpiece and rolled bead neckpiece with salvaged Sydney World Youth Day banner dress Featured in Textiles in Context exhibition, 2016
 Photo Emma Rowan-Kelly & Andre Matkovic

opportunity has been a success. She has had work returned to her severely compromised or unable to reach the intended exhibition through being held up in Customs. Artists do indeed have to be extremely resilient, fierce in their commitment yet able to adapt – an 'artistic alchemy' that applies to lifestyle as well as creative output.

A clear example of Pascoe's alchemy leaps out at you upon opening her website to find *This is the Pyrocene*, a striking red ensemble which was 'born during Australia's Black Summer; she is our humanity-wide act of self-immolation'. It's made from 450 linear meters of hemp braid, hand pleated and sculpted, with mask and embellishments created from salvaged upholstery trimming, sample swatches and broken jewellery components. It too, 'works on every level'.

Janet De Boer OAM October 2020

