

FIFTIES, FASHION AND EMERGING FEMINISM

: A CONTEMPORARY RESPONSE

Collyer
Bristow
Gallery

Focus on five...

for each exhibition the curators focus on five works of art in more detail

Dress, 2011. Alice Angus and Fee Doran (AKA Mrs. Jones)



Alice Angus creates projects in response to a particular location, community or question and is interested in the relationship between the 'myth' and the lived experience. For this exhibition she has taken drawings inspired from conversations with small local businesses in Lancaster; in particular an elderly tailor who mused that the last suit that he cut would be the last cut in Lancaster. Angus has had these exquisite drawings printed on to fabric, and in collaboration with the designer Fee Doran (aka Mrs Jones), has created a dress, apron and chair cover for the exhibition. The dress and apron reflect the conflict of the idealised glamour of 50's fashion against the reality of the everyday for the 50's housewife. Along with the 1950's chair the fabrics incorporate traces of embroidery and snippets of conversation sewn into folds, pleats and hems - past oral histories are captured and archived, albeit invisible to the eye.

Fashion Chess, 2010. WESSIELING



Placed within the context of the Festival of Britain WESSIELING's 'Fashion Chess' offers up an intriguing conversation around the complex economic and cultural relationships between modern cities that have developed over time. The cultural capital of fashion is a continual thread in her work. These stunning chess tables in high gloss lacquer, whose chess pieces are iconic buildings of fashion capitals positioned as if in play in a chess match present Modernity, East versus West and a struggle for power. They convey the hierarchical system and competition between fashion cities, mingling with troops of mannequins. The work is a visual metaphor for cities at war and globalisation within the fashion and textile industries. Dr Wessie Ling is currently a Senior Lecturer at the London College of Fashion, University of the Arts, London.

He's Behind You, 2011. Freddie Robins

Freddie Robins is known for her extraordinary textile works that manipulate material and imagery in subversive narratives. For the exhibition Robins explores the flip side of the story being projected through the periscope of the Festival of Britain. "The stereotypical image of the fifties is of a modern, clean world where glamorous women flit around homes filled with contemporary, colourful design by the likes of Lucienne Day. The truth for most women was quite different. The shadow of the war still loomed, rationing for textiles and clothing hadn't ended until 1949" (FR). This piece, a quiet, unassuming cupboard, contains the ghosts of that time. "He's behind you", is a reflection on those other stories that came out of the 50's that precipitated the yearning desire for sexual liberation synonymous with the following decades.



Ceri from the series Retro Girls, 2011. Carole Evans

Carole Evans' 'Ceri' from her series 'Retro Girls' looks at style and the fashion industry from a contemporary perspective that resonates across the decades. 'Retro Girls' are portraits of women who dress in the style of the 1940's and 50's. Despite being 21st century women: ambitious, driven, and dedicated to their careers, they make the effort to put their hair in curlers. Evans has styled the photographs in the classic poses and backdrops of 1950's studio photography whilst clues, such as Ceri's nose stud, reveal that, in fact, these are contemporary portraits. These women are part of a specific sub-culture which has become a lifestyle choice: their clothes are originals from the era or vintage inspired, sourced from vintage shops and eBay. Many do this as a conscious comment against mass production in fashion and the throw away culture of the 21st century. The tension in these images, where mid-century meets the present day suggests an ambivalence with the idealised, spun notion of the 50's and what we know to be the reality.





One of the many designs printed at the Footprints workshop

'Festival of Britain' hankie, 1951. Joyce Clissold

The Museum and Study Collection at Central St Martins holds, amongst other gems, printed fabrics and items that document the beginning of women becoming stakeholders and gaining creative freedom within the fashion and textile design worlds. A significant collection is by the textile designer Joyce Clissold, a student at the Central School from 1924 to 1927 and teacher of Textile Design there from 1936 to 1940. Clissold took over the Footprints workshop, where she had worked as a student, in 1929 and created all subsequent designs. By 1933 the Footprints studio had moved to Brentford and enjoyed continuing prosperity, opening two London shops in the mid to late 1930s. After the war she continued to run Footprints on a smaller scale until her death in 1982.

This 'Festival of Britain' hankie was designed by Clissold. The Festival, held in 1951, provided post-war Britain a conduit to re-secure its international standing through a celebration of new technologies, science and culture. Clissold's hankie does not reflect the new, bright, clean-cut Modernist aesthetic (unlike her yellow scarf for Liberty's – see reception wall), but it does illustrate the concerns that were shaping this new era. Over a row of streetlights are the words – Industry, Science, Arts and Home.