THE ART OF ANNEMIEKE MEIN

13 September 2025 to 17 May 2026 (Exhibition 13)
Gippsland Art Gallery

DIVING BLUE-BILLED DUCK 1992

Textile wall sculpture.
145 x 103 x 6 cm.
Gippsland Art Gallery collection.

Appliqué and machine embroidery, textile paints, machine and hand embroidery threads (cotton, silk and synthetic), silk organza, satin, taffeta, felt, interfacing, dacron filler, on cotton canvas

A rare and protected species, the diving blue-billed duck pursues its prey underwater with remarkable speed and grace. This work portrays only a split second in time. The duck is in fast pursuit of a small fish (a carp). The time taken from spotting a fish to surfacing with the fish in its bill all seems to happen in the blink of an eye. I've watched these beautiful shy ducks in action at Lake Guthridge, at the Sale Common, and at Dowd's Morass. Its diving propulsion is entirely done by its legs and feet.

Observing and understanding water movement was also a major part of the work, especially how water layers move upward and downward, displaced with the pressure and speed of impact in a duck-dive and with the swishing of the duck's webbed feet. I wanted to display the many abstract patterns created, the way the light catches on air bubbles, the way different layers and depths of water swirl and twist and seem lighter or darker or denser, and the way the colours are refracted in some water areas. Because I couldn't physically get down in the water with the duck and see all first-hand, I experimented with dropping heavy stones coated with food dye into a fish tank for the underwater effects. The surface splash was easier and effectively observed by dropping rocks into a pool of water. The work shows the delicate balance between the abstract shapes in colour and texture, within a realistic portrayal.

Diving Blue-billed Duck was donated through the Australian Government Cultural Gifts Program by the Bate family in memory of John & Liz Bate, 2020.

DIVING BLUE-BILLED DUCK
DESIGN PLAN 1992

Pencil on glass paper.
92 x 43 cm.
Private collection.

COLOUR PLAN 1992

Pastel on paper.
96 x 50 cm.
Private collection.

These two plans are developing and working sketches for *Diving Blue-billed Duck*.

The idea was to have most of the duck merge in with the 'froth and bubble' of the watery dive. Only the head of the duck was to be finely detailed. The rest of the duck is a wash of merging tones of brown, tan and blue to give the illusion of speed and movement through the water.

A great deal of artistic licence was used in this work. The duck was elongated and stretched out to enhance the diving action. Its neck is stretched to give greater emphasis to the fish chase. The tail and wing feathers are lengthened and drawn in abstract streaks to accent speeding through water.

SEA GAR SCHOOL 1993

86 x 94 cm.
Gippsland Art Gallery collection. Purchased with the assistance of the Rotary Club of Sale, 1993.

Appliqué, machine embroidery, fabric paints, silk organza, synthetic fluorescent and metallic fibres, lurex, glitter threads, iron-on interfacing, machine threads (silk, cotton, polyester, rayon) on cotton canvas.

Sea Gar School and *Sea Gar* were made together and share all the same fabrics, threads, and paints.

Sea Gar School depicts a school of garfish rising from the depths of the ocean to feed in the warm surface waters. There is protection in numbers as they dart through the water side-by-side.

The fish were painted on silk organza with underlays of lustre paints and metallic fibres to give a fish-like glitter to the fish scales.

FANTAIL RHAPSODY 1987

High-relief sculpture with relief sections extending beyond the frame.
165 x 170 x 12(relief) cm
Private collection.

Appliqué and machine embroidery, fabric paints, silk organza, felt, iron-on backings, dacron wadding, gaberdine, satin, wool (homespun and commercial, dyed), embroidery threads (cotton), machine threads (silk, cotton, and polyester) on cotton canvas.

Inspiration for the design of *Fantail Rhapsody* was stimulated by my first visit to the commissioners' house overlooking Lake Glenmaggie in August 1986.The house itself is in a spectacular setting with peaceful panoramic views if water, hills, and native bush. Only the birds broke the silence. I have tried to capture these initial impressions in the work.

I also tried to capture the sense of bird noise, particularly through the interaction of four siblings all demanding food at once. The parent bird (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*) is portrayed gently and patiently doing the best it can under the circumstances.

Four fledgling fantails were chosen because the commissioners have four (now adult) offspring, and it

tickled my fancy that the work might remind them of their labours when the family was young. Fantails were abundant at Lake Glenmaggie in the 1980s.
The flora portrayed is grey box (*Eucalyptus macrocarpa* hybrid). The leaves are shown in various stages of development ranging from bright new shoots to dark older leaves. What they have in common is abundant gall growths from wasp infestation as well as many eaten-out holes where insects had previously dined. The dark gaberdine fabric leaves were my husband Phillip's old 1950s English-made raincoat. He generously surrendered it to me for the sake of art!

SUPERB BLUE WRENS 1981

Low-relief textile wall panel.
120 x 140 x 5 (relief) cm.
Gippsland Art Gallery collection.

My garden in Sale has been the home of a Superb Blue Wren family (*Malurus cyaneus*) for many years. I have found them readily attracted with morsels of cheese or breadcrumbs, yet astute enough to remain completely 'wild'. The sight and sounds of their hunting antics and acrobatics never fail to cheer me.
Superb Blue Wrens shows a hungry, demanding and full-of-action juvenile wren just after it has ventured out of the nest. The colourful adult male offers it a succulent grasshopper.
Their textile 'environment' is designed to suggest low scrub, with messy foliage, bracken, twigs and dead leaves in stitches and appliqué, and paint used for shadows.
My main intention was to capture the expression and animation of the young bird as it was demanding to be fed. Its unbalanced stance, with wings flapping to maintain a hold, tail splayed unnaturally wide and mouth agape, all say 'Feed me now!'. In contrast, the blue male stands serenely, taking his time. I have often wanted to play a sound recording with this work so that others could experience the volume of noise such a small bird can produce.
Up to seven layers of fine silk organza, and intricate embroidery, were used to achieve the desired feather effects of hard quills, soft down, dark shadows, highlights, and colour gradings in this work.
An audio-visual presentation on the preliminary drawings, sketches, layouts, sewing samples and construction is available on the making of *Superb Blue Wrens*.

SUPERB BLUE WRENS – PENCIL 1981

Pencil on paper.
70 x 68 cm.
Private collection.

SUPERB BLUE WRENS – COLLAGE 1981

Pencil, ink, watercolour.
70 x 68 cm.
Private collection.

DANCE OF THE MAYFLIES 1988

High relief textile wall work.
110 x 180 x 10 cm.
Gippsland Art Gallery collection.

Appliqué, machine embroidery, fabric paint, silk organza, cotton, taffeta, synthetic fur, fabric-covered buttons, on cotton canvas.
Dance of the Mayflies leans towards a mystical interpretation and mood-setting work rather than being a portrayal of mayflies that are absolutely correct in every anatomical detail or colour. It was commissioned by Mr John Leslie OBE in 1987.
The scene is set at dusk with the moon rising. The sky has a soft pink lustre. The heavily embroidered valley and tree line are deliberately contrasted with the relatively plain areas of the rest of the canvas. These simple areas add to the feeling of space, fragility, and flight, and allow the mayflies to be the predominant feature.
Action lines have been added around the wings to increase the sense of movement and upward flight. They are in a variety of pale and dark threads to suit the moon's light and to merge the mayflies and their background environment smoothly.
Dance of the Mayflies was donated by John Leslie OBE through the Australian Government Cultural Gifts Program, 2009.

MAYFLY LIFE CYCLE 1988

High relief textile wall work.
133 x 44 x 10 cm.
Gippsland Art Gallery collection.

Appliqué, machine embroidery, fabric paint, silk organza, cotton, taffeta, synthetic fur, fabric-covered buttons, on cotton canvas.
Mayflies (Ephemeroptera) began to intrigue me after I collected specimens at Lake Guthridge in Sale and then researched their life cycle for *Dance of the Mayflies*. This long, thin wall work shows their aquatic life cycle from egg to nymph, and then subimago (or intermediate adult) to airborne adult.
The scientific name of the order, Ephemeroptera, stems from a Greek word meaning 'living a day'. As this suggests, these insects have a short adult life. They are unable to eat once they have emerged from the final nymphal moult. They die within hours of mating. Mayfly eggs are laid on water or submerged vegetation and become anchored by fine threads. They hatch as nymphs that feed under water and shed their skin up to twenty times. These nymphs can live up to three years. At the end of its aquatic life the nymph rises to the surface, its back splits open and a dull coloured, winged insect emerges. It cannot fly well at all. Soon after, it splits again and the fully coloured adult with glittering translucent wings appears. This occurrence of a subimago is unique in the insect world.

Mayfly Life Cycle was donated by John Leslie OBE through the Australian Government Cultural Gifts Program, 2009.

THE COCKROACH 2024

Textile sculpture - mobile.
45 x 70 x 63 cm.
Private collection.

The Australian cockroach (*Periplaneta australasiae*) is one of the largest pest cockroaches that invade our homes and is about 4 cm long. There are over 530 species of cockroaches identified in Australia with many more not yet identified or described. Their flattened body, with the head directed downward, and a slippery wax (cuticle) covering its body all help it to squeeze through the smallest spaces. Australian cockroaches are among the fastest insects on land on the planet – they can cover one metre in one second! They are also a much-maligned insect, but they are excellent compost makers!

The Cockroach sculpture is designed to hang as a mobile at eye level to be able to view both top and bottom of the work. It is a statement work, 'tongue in cheek' with a little dig at clothing companies that manufacture cheap, throw-away, fast-fashion clothing made from petroleum/plastic that mostly ends up in landfill. The labels used are particularly focused on the brands that have their clothing manufactured overseas (China, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia etc) using cheap human labour even perhaps sweat-shop style 'slavery'.

I am as well bemoaning the loss of our Australian textile industries. This is represented by the Australian made labels on the mouth of the cockroach. The Australia Post name and symbol on the underside of the top wings was used to represent all the millions of parcels they deliver of this fast-fashion clothing. And here is the irony – fast-fashion companies are a bit like cockroaches – cockroaches turn landfill into compost!

The Cockroach was drafted and made in 33 individual parts which were finally stitched together (where possible by machine, but mostly by hand). The 2 antennae, 6 legs, and 4 wings are structurally supported by 1.6 mm PVC-covered wire. These 12 wires are internally attached to a black perforated aluminium metal plate to hold all in their designed shape.

This is my 5th recycled label work. A new technique featured here is the bunching and stitching of labels of all the same size, make, and colour to give

1. a textured surface in one area, or
2. a flat, smooth surface in another area.

E.g. the pink Millers Woman on the back of the thorax are bunched and ruffled, while the BeMe and Kirkton House labels on the top and bottom of the abdomen are stitched together to lie flat.

Materials: recycled fabric clothing labels; silk and crystal organza; wool, cotton, silk fibres; PVC-covered wire; perforated aluminium plate; synthetic felt filler; nylon net; brass eyelets; machine embroidery threads; fishing line.

Footnote: I'd no sooner finished the work when the news came out that the Mosaic Group had gone into liquidation!

JAWS – LACEWING LARVA 2025

Textile sculpture – mobile.
23 x 47 x 57 cm
Private collection.

Jaws – Lacewing Larva is part of a series of small sculptures based on real insects that all look 'stranger than fiction'. Lacewing larvae are a gardener's best friend as they are aphid eaters and murderers. My husband, Phillip, LOVES lacewings in his vegetable garden as they eat all the 'nasties' that want to eat his produce! Over millennia, the lacewing larva has developed massive mandibles (jaws) to capture its prey and suck out their juices through these mandibles.

In *Jaws – Lacewing Larva* (*Neuroptera, myiodactylid, nymphid*) I have depicted one of the most ancient group of insects surviving today. They are now restricted to only Australasia and are sadly in severe decline. Only fossil forms are seen from other parts of the world.

There were several challenges in designing and stitching this work:

1. The shape. The feathery curved outer spines needed to be self-supporting and delicate-looking. After many experiments, I settled for a backing of thick synthetic black felt (which was painful to cut so intricately) with a zigzag attachment of a piece of 20-gauge wire down the centre of each spine and then stitching cut pieces of black loofah to the top and bottom of each spine.
2. The mandibles. These pincer-like jaws have a very distinctive shape and needed to look and sit just right. They were made of 4-ply PVC-coated wire which was split into 2-ply sections to create a two-pronged pincer-like mandible shape. The wire was then covered with 4 cm wide cut strips of netting wrapped very tightly into the designed shapes - the more wrapping, the thicker the shape. Tiny hand stitches stop the netting from unravelling. The most difficult part of the whole work was to fit these jaws into the head and have them sit firm, stable, and correctly angled!
3. Internal supports. Three perforated aluminium plates were cut and fitted to join areas for support and strength:
    - One in the head to support the heavy jaws leaning forward
    - Another inside the whole body (thorax and abdomen) to attach the 6 legs and to support the weight of the whole insect body.
    - The third was required to join the other 2 plates together for stability of the whole work.
4. The eyes. Lacewing larvae have very strange-looking eyes. They are flat with large circles on them. After several attempts, I settled on glass beads for the circles. These also best suited the beading on the insect's back.

Credit goes to my husband Phillip for making the internal supports using perforated aluminium plate and plied PVC-covered wire for the mandibles and legs.
Materials: crystal organza, satin, paper webbing, synthetic felt, cotton binding, synthetic filler, net, loofah, embroidery cottons, microwave dyed and spun silk, 1.6 mm PVC-coated wire, perforated aluminium plate, 20-gauge jewellery wire, glass beads, metal eyelets, iron-on fabric, pipe cleaners, machine embroidery threads.
Footnote: We love lacewings so much that when we find an adult lacewing in the house (presumably from a larva which has come into the kitchen with the garden produce) we carefully take it back outside to live and produce offspring to eat more aphids!

SHOWCASE 1
DIVING BLUE-BILLED DUCK 1992
Workbook samples showing trials, errors, methods, and techniques.

1. Overall action design plan.
2. Duck and fish sketch.
3. Duck feathers and feet more defined.
4. Detailed canvas design plan – water movement.
5. Feather fall detail of Duck face and specific dramatic eye focus. Crested Grebe painted on silk organza. (The decision at the time was to portray either a duck or a grebe – the duck won).
6. Duck trials painted on silk organza.
7. Colour bar of paints used on the canvas background setting.
8. Fish trials
    a. some fish scales are trimmed away to show underlying shiny fabric.
    b. painted silk fish with a metallic fabric underneath to shimmer and glow through the silk.

SHOWCASE 2
WHIRLPOOL FROG 1994
FROG

1. Small frog paint trial on silk
2. Full size frog painting (4 sections shown)
    a. Hind leg
    b. Face in two parts
    c. Eye
3. Compiled frog face – underlying fabrics in place
4. Remnants of underlying fabrics used
5. Patterns for cutting underlying fabrics

WATER

6. Whirlpool bubbles paint and stitch trial
7. Low-relief bubbles – paint, stitching, padding
8. Sewing thread off-cuts from water sewing

WHIRLPOOL FROG
1994
Textile wall sculpture
105 x 170 cm
Private collection.
Appliqué and machine embroidery, textile paints, hand and machine embroidery threads (silk, cotton, synthetic, metallics), silk and silk organza, crystal organza, satin, felt, cotton, iron-on interfacing, dacron padding, on cotton canvas.
Machine sewing threads were carefully chosen to match or accentuate the painted colours of pinks, purples, blues, and greens. The free-sewing method (loose presser foot or dropped feed dog) was used throughout the canvas stitching. It creates the smooth flowing lines that visually enhance the appearance of moving water.
Many types of threads were used. They ranged from the thick button-hole cottons to fine polyesters, shiny silks, and glittery metallic threads.
Some of the water bubbles are flat and only painted on the canvas backing. Others are machine stitched and padded from behind. A few were made separately and then stuffed with dacron, quilted and appliquéd to the frog at the throat and toes.
The frog was stitched (and painted) in 10 separate pieces (two eyes, top jaw, bottom jaw, nose-bridge, four legs and underbelly). This allows the frog to be assembled in low relief once the body parts are fabric-underlaid, stitched, quilted, and padded with dacron filler. Each part must fit together exactly where designed or the frog would look distorted. Some days are more unpicking than sewing - sometimes I just have to start all over again.
There are some eight different coloured and textured fabrics, cut in precise shapes, and used as underlays so that their colours glow through the painted silk organza. For example, slivers of yellow fluorescent crystal organza lie under the painted silk of the jaw line, the padded elbow, the raised kneecap, and the bubble-kicking pointed toes. These areas will glitter when the work is lit by a spotlight. Also, cream satin together with blue and pink crystal organza pieces lie under the frog's breast, with mauve, green, aqua, and blue satin under the legs and feet. Supporting all these little bits of fabric is a thin layer of cream felt, backed with iron-on interfacing.
With everything pinned and tacked together, the machine stitching began. I used stitches that emulate the warty knobbly shapes on the frog's flesh, free-sewing them in roughly circular shapes.
The frog's jaw line, throat, belly, and foreleg were moulded, padded, and quilted into low relief. The partial webbing between the toes was not attached to the canvas so that the webbing would also stand out in low relief.