

THE ART OF ANNEMIEKE MEIN

25 August 2026 to 12 February 2027
Gippsland Art Gallery

THE LEAFY SEADRAGON 2026

High-relief textile wall panel

Size 92 x 116 x 5 (relief) cm

Private collection

The leafy seadragon (*Phycodurus eques*) is South Australia's marine emblem. It is a close relative of the weedy seadragon and also found only in Australian waters. It looks both animal and vegetable! It is one of the world's masters of camouflage, appearing as floating piece of seaweed thus avoiding predators.

Leafy seadragons look calm, graceful, and ethereal floating in the water with the current. They make minute movements with their gills and never stray far from their patch of foliage.

Whenever I look at water (from above or underneath) I always see sparkles of glitter that catch the sunlight as the water ebbs, flows, or swirls. Hence, my portrayal of glitter at the left in the water reeds.

The main body of water has mostly been stitched in endless rows of thick machine threads using false sewing machine tension to create loops. This helps to add texture as well as the impression of gentle water movement.

Baby seadragons, identical to their parents, are well camouflaged swimming among the water reeds.

If I thought *The Weedy Seadragon* work was difficult, I certainly met my match with *The Leafy Seadragon* – the days of unpicking, remaking, and agonising over aesthetic decisions became daunting.

THE WEEDY SEADRAGON 2026

Low-relief textile wall panel

Size 92 x 116 x 2 (relief) cm

Private collection

The weedy seadragon (*Phyllopteryx taeniolatus*) is Victoria's marine emblem. It is classified as a fish and is unique to Australia.

My first very damaged specimen was found on the beach at Sandy Point (South Gippsland) in the 1960s. The second specimen was a fresh one washed up during a storm near the pier at Flinders in 1999. It still had most of its vivid, luminous and iridescent colours. I still get goose bumps with the imprinted memory of its beauty! At the time, I did a number of sketches and colour notes. At that point in my art practice, I was concentrating on the muted tones of the Australian bush and only minimally included brilliant colours. Today, I've learnt to be more adventurous with bright colours.

Drawing, painting and stitching this long thin fish would not have been possible for me without reference to the real specimens.

I've portrayed the weedy seadragon swimming, following the 'pull and push' of the ocean swell and tide. I wanted to portray a strong forward tidal thrust pushing the seadragons from left to right. They seem to sway and slide effortlessly. Their only mode of self-directed propulsion is by the dorsal fin along its back and the two small pectoral fins on each side of the neck.

Credit: With special thanks to Coralie Griffiths of Griffith's Sea Shell Museum and Marine Display at Lakes Entrance, Victoria. For their research information and kind loan of a weedy seadragon specimen.

THE WEEDY SEADRAGON COLOUR PLAN 2026

Ink, pastel

61 x 81 cm (framed)

Private collection.

FANTAIL RHAPSODY 1987

High-relief sculpture with relief sections extending beyond the frame.

165 x 170 x 12 (relief) cm

Collection Gippsland Art Gallery. Donated by Joy and Ray Wootton through the Gippsland Art Gallery Foundation, 2024

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 of 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!

SILVEREYES 1983

High relief textile wall sculpture.

100 x 105 x 8 cm.

Gippsland Art Gallery collection.

This work is designed to radiate the distinctive prissiness and delicacy of the Silvereye (*Zosterops lateralis*), and their sociable and harmonious behaviour. Of all the honeyeaters in my garden, silvereyes are the most attractive and least aggressive.

Because silvereyes always stay in dense vegetation, I wanted this wall work to have more density than space. To achieve this, I designed the grevillea flowers and leaves (*Grevillea rosmarinifolia* 'Lutea') to lead in around the birds on five levels: spray paint, a pale paint wash, a paint wash with surface stitching, heavily detailed stitching, and relief fabric sculpture. This enabled me to prominently feature the silvereyes, yet still retain the thick foliage and sense of camouflage. Shadows created by the relief leaves also add to the three-dimensional effect.

SILVEREYES – GREVILLEA PAINT TRIAL 1983

Paint wash and sprayed paint on canvas.

71 x 61 cm.

Gippsland Art Gallery collection, donated by the artist.

A paint trial of the grevillea (*Grevillea rosmarinifolia* 'Lutea') flower heads and leaves for *Silvereyes 1983*.

The canvas background was spray-painted with an insect spray-pump along the bottom and right side to create density and darkness.

The grevillea flowers and leaves were hand-painted over the sprayed canvas.

When the grevillea flowers were in season, our silvereyes would feast on their nectar from dawn to dusk.

EASTERN WATER DRAGON 1979

High relief textile, appliqué and machine embroidery.

117 x 132 x 6 cm.

Gippsland Art Gallery collection.

I designed this portrayal of the Eastern Water Dragon to be larger than life-size and as big as possible to execute on a normal dressmaking sewing machine. It was also an example of my early experiments in drafting for relief angles, padding from behind and quilting. The lizard's head was designed, drafted, cut and stitched in nine separate sections to achieve the required shapes and angles, such as the bulging eye, recessed nostril, indented jaw-line and puffed-out cheeks.

This textile wall panel portrays the quiet confidence and seeming arrogance of the Eastern Water Dragon. Its size, the tilt of its head, the sardonic smile, the unblinking eye and poised 'ready to pounce' look all add to its awesomeness.

EASTERN WATER DRAGON 1979

Pencil on paper

41 x 50.5 cm (framed).

Gippsland Art Gallery collection, donated by the artist.

My first face-to-face encounter with an Eastern Water Dragon (*Physignathus howittii*) was in a secluded spot at The Quarries along Freestone Creek at Briagolong in Gippsland. Its colour markings provided excellent camouflage among the rocks, branches and water. Their fearless reptilian expression reminds me of huge fairytale dragons and they invoke in me a sense of history, and of evolution.

DANCE OF THE MAYFLIES 1988

High relief textile wall work.

110 x 180 x 10(relief) cm.

Collection Gippsland Art Gallery. Donated by John Leslie OBE through the Australian Government Cultural Gifts Program, 2009.

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.

MAYFLY LIFE CYCLE 1988

High relief textile wall work.

133 x 44 x 10(relief) cm.

Collection Gippsland Art Gallery. Donated by John Leslie OBE through the Australian Government Cultural Gifts Program, 2009.

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.

BLUEY – THE HAIRY FLOWER WASP 2025

Textile sculpture – mobile

60 x 65 x 40 cm

Private collection.

The female Blue Hairy Flower Wasp (*Austroscolia soror*) is a spectacular insect to watch effortlessly gliding and hovering just above ground level in search of food for her young. She stings and paralyzes grubs, beetles, or weevils and lays one egg on each of her prey. The wasp itself feeds on flower nectar. It is large (up to 3 cm long) with a black hairy body. The wings have a distinctive metallic/iridescent blue, aqua, and purple sheen.

Of all the insects in my 'Stranger than Fiction' series, this wasp was the most complex and challenging to make in every aspect such as colour, shape, fabric techniques, and especially the construction.

Finding the 'just right' fabric for the hairy parts of the wasp was finally resolved with the purchase of a hairy black knitted jacket in an Opportunity Shop. A face mask had to be worn when cutting the fabric as miniscule polyester fibres were released which rushed straight up my nose causing coughing and sneezing. Frequent vacuum cleaning was required and essential.

Other than the wasp wings, the insect was hand-stitched. Black stitches on black fabric required a powerful spotlight. A curved surgical needle was used to stitch through the deep curves of the wasp's thorax, and to stretch the furry knit around the body.

Internal wiring holds the body sections together. Heavy 2-ply PVC-covered wire runs from the sting end through the body to behind the eyes. Two perforated aluminium plates in the thorax support the 4 wings and 6 legs. Each wing also has pieces of the same perforated aluminium plate inserted to keep them upright. Chicken wire shapes were made for the abdomen and head. These were then wrapped with self-adhesive bandages (recycled from my husband's Blood Bank donation dressings).

Materials: furry polyester knit, felt, cotton, crystal organza, net, Dacron, self-adhesive bandage, Heat bond, iron-on interfacing, metallic synthetics, chicken wire, perforated aluminium plate, 2.2 mm PVC-covered wire, copper wire, machine sewing threads, cord, glass beads.

THE FLUFFY BUM NYMPH 2025

Textile sculpture – mobile.

75 x 60 x 90 cm

Private collection.

'Fluffy Bum' is the common colloquial name for the passion vine hopper (*Scolypopa australis*). It is an extraordinary, almost unreal-looking insect. They are 'groupies' and hide away in foliage bunched together, sucking plant sap and leaving a honeydew secretion that ants and bees love. Ten of these tiny insects would cover my thumbnail. Why they have these long white fluffy filaments at the end of their abdomen is a mystery.

Those who have experienced these nymphs will know them by their magnificent leap into the air when they are disturbed. My theory is that the fluffy bum gives them a soft landing!

Inspiration for this work came from my gardener husband presenting me with a clutch of about 50 hoppers after pruning the lemon tree. They really took my fancy and especially after learning their (appropriate) common name! The hardest part of making this work was visually interpreting the 'fluffy bum' aspect with credibility in textile/fibre. Some 40 different textures were trialled and failed. Finally, I decided on mixed bunches of stiffened sisal, white wire, spray painted cotton-covered florist wire, recycled paper-covered wire, white plastic grass-like leaves, and artificial flower pieces.

The rest of the hopper's body is made of 2 layers of painted silk organza on top of white synthetic felt with an internal polyester filler. The antennae and legs are of painted net wrapped around PVC-covered wire. Structural supports include 2-ply 1.6 mm PVC-covered wire, 2 perforated aluminium plates, fine copper wire, gauge 3 fishing sinkers, and metal eyelets.

Materials: Textile paint, silk organza, synthetic felt, iron-on fibres, polyester filler, gabardine, recycled woven gold thread fabric (Indian), pipe cleaners, copper wire, metal eyelets, plastic tubing, glass beads, and a variety of machine embroidery threads.

THE SHEEP BLOWFLY LIFE CYCLE 1995

High relief textile wall sculpture on two levels

76 x 92 x 6 cm.

Gippsland Art Gallery collection. Purchased with the assistance of the John Leslie Foundation, 2022.

Three stages of the sheep blowfly life cycle are windowed in recesses on a lower surface plane behind the main canvas. None of the stages are in scale to each other. Instead, I have concentrated on accentuating the beauty, colour and texture of each stage of development in a combination of realism and abstract design.

The work was designed and made in five main parts:

1. The overall uniting canvas featuring a farmland scene, with sheep, trees, a creek, low-lying fog in a valley and a distant mountain range. A green rectangle was painted on this to set off the red-eyed fly.

2. The mature adult sheep blowfly clinging to the green rectangle was made separately. The fly was broken down into ten individual parts and each piece made separately.
3. The eggs of the sheep blowfly.
4. Eggs hatching into larvae in the midst of a wound.
5. The pupae, burrowed under the soil, and in their pupal cases.

Techniques: painting (silk organza, crystal organza and canvas), machine stitching (tailor tacking, free-sewing, and straight stitch), hand embroidery (bullion knots, stem stitch and long stitch), trapunto, beading, quilting, padding, plying, steam moulding, unravelling.

Material used: canvas, silk and crystal organza, satin, silk, nylon, lamination plastic, beads, velour, lurex, combed wool, embroidery silk and cotton, machine threads, dacron filler.

FLY STUDY 1995

High-relief textile wall panel.

80 x 83 x 6 cm

Gippsland Art Gallery collection.

Donated by Dr Max Whitten, 2025

Many of us are squeamish around flies, maggots, blood and rotting flesh. I confess that they are not my favourite subjects either, as their life cycle is rather gruesome. Yet, as I have discovered before, many insects considered distasteful are really quite beautiful when viewed closely. I had been asked by the staff of the CSIRO (Division of Entomology) to design and make a small sheep blowfly textile for the retiring head of department, Dr Max Whitten, as one of his major research projects has been the sheep blowfly (*Lucilia cuprina*). This fly belongs to the *Calliphoridae* family which, in Greek, means 'bearer of great beauty' - an apt description.

Wonderful references, specimens of the whole life cycle, colour photographs and electron microscope pictures arrived at the studio. Current projects were put aside and before I realised it, I was deep into the subject, and I stayed there for nearly two years. Four major works have been made as a result of these endeavours – *Flystrike (The Sheep Blowfly)* 1995, *Fly Study* 1995, *The Sheep Blowfly Life Cycle* 1995, and *Invasion* 1996 - as well as smaller works – *On The Edge* 1995, *Filial Fly* 1996, *The Blowie* 1996, *Feral Fly* 1997 - and some works on paper.

Techniques: painting (silk organza, crystal organza, canvas), machine stitching (tailor tacking, free-sewing, straight stitch), hand embroidery (bullion knots, stem stitch, long stitch), trapunto, beading, quilting, padding, plying, steam moulding, unravelling.

Materials: canvas, silk and crystal organza, satin, silk, nylon, lamination plastic, beads, velour, lurex, combed wool, embroidery silk and cotton, machine threads, dacron filler.

INVASION 1996

Mounted on two levels.

High-relief wall panel.

125 x 117 x 6 cm.

Private collection.

Without the flies, the scenery of trees, hills and creek bed would be idyllic for pleasurable pastimes such as picnicking, bushwalking or camping. But then, there are the flies - all gloriously clothed in their metallic armoury, and all passionate about sharing our company.

The two distinct levels of 'Invasion' were designed to highlight and focus the design towards the paler central panel featuring a black-and-white fly and a metallic green fly.

All the colourful flies are screen printed on calico, then painted, stitched, padded with dacron, quilted and hand embroidered for wispy body hairs. These hairs stand out in a relief of several centimetres from their bodies. The black-and-white fly is tonal washed in blues and discreetly stitched with silver metallic thread.

Thousands of tiny airborne flies are painted and stitched into the darker sky area of the top panel.

SHOWCASE 1

THE WEEDY SEADRAGON 2026

Workbook samples showing trials, errors, methods, and techniques.

SHOWCASE 2

BLOWFLIES

Workbook samples showing trials, errors, methods, and techniques.

