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The last few years have seen a rising international interest in textiles – perhaps propelled by restorative art histories and demands for historically gendered crafts to be dignified with their true value, perhaps as a necessary return to the haptic and the handmade in the face of so many screens.

Having always been deeply attached to her materials, it was only natural that Christchurch-based artist **Emma Fitts** would turn to the fibre arts, lured in by the possibilities of movement, narrative and memory. Over the last few years, Fitts has utilised fabric as a way of interpreting the social histories dredged up from the archive, treating these stories in a way that foregrounds their ‘feeling’ nature and connections to human bodies.

One of her earlier textile works, *Bomber Jacket for Marilyn Waring* (2014), makes this bodily connection particularly stark, taking the form of a silky, multi-hued banner stitched together from fabric pieces that would form a garment designed especially for *Waring*. This piece was borne out of a research project undertaken with Fitts’ collaborator **Amelia Bywater** (the pair operating as Victor & Hester) which considered the gaps in information available around three female figures – **Marilyn Waring**, **Rowena Cade** and **Marlow Moss**. Their research manifested as a blog entitled *What(was) ishappening*, a name that touches poetically upon the concerns that continue to drive Fitts’ practice, such as the way social and material histories shape the world we live in today.

These concerns took on an architectural facet during her 2014 Olivia Spencer Bower residency, with her collection of speculative garment works expanding to include **Spencer Bower** herself – indeed, expanding so much that the works could be hung to form a kind of soft architecture of their own, mirroring the layout of Bower’s home within the Ilam Campus Gallery. Entitled *Fit-out for Olivia Spencer Bower* (2015), the work went on to be shown again at CoCA as part of the ‘Contemporary Christchurch’ survey exhibition in 2016.

These thoughtful, flag-like works have become something of a signature for Fitts, but she continues to push this form. For her 2017 exhibition at The Dowse Art Museum, *From Pressure to Vibration—The Event of a Thread*, Fitts worked alongside and in response to a selection of works from The Dowse collection, creating a series of curving, sculptural felted pieces. Even more recently, with her exhibition *Section, Elevation, Perspective* at Parlour Projects, Fitts has treated the history of a wall hanging made especially by **Judy Patience** for the Wellington Court of Appeal in 1978, and subsequently lost when the Court was refurbished in the 1990s, spotlighting this loss with her small and immensely tactile, almost institutional-looking hangings.

In 2018, Fitts will undertake the prestigious McCahon House Artists’ residency. With plans to explore the domestic history of **Anne** and **Colin McCahon**, it will be exciting to see how she responds to such a significant and loaded site from Aotearoa’s art history.

Lucinda Bennett

1. Emma Fitts, *Fit-Out for Olivia Spencer Bower*, 2015. Silk, linen, leather, wool. Installation image, dimensions vary. Installation at Ilam Gallery, University of Canterbury, Christchurch. Work included five hanging works, each approximately 190 x 120cm, a planted garden and ceramic vase, dimensions vary. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND MELANIE ROGER GALLERY, AUCKLAND. PHOTO: DAEGAN WELLS

2. Emma Fitts, *Bomber Jacket for Marilyn Waring*, 2014. Denim on Silk, 185 x 245 cm. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

3. Emma Fitts, *Court of Appeal 5*, 2017, wool, silk & linen mounted on linen in wooden frame, 31.5 x 39.5cm (framed). COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND PARLOUR PROJECTS, HASTINGS

4. Emma Fitts, *From Pressure to Vibration / The Event of a Thread*, 2017. Wool, silk, cotton, linen, polyester. Installation image, dimensions vary. Textile Installation at The Dowse Art Museum, Wellington. Six felted woollen banners respond to a series of textiles works from their collection, including the works of Margery Blackman, Judy Patience, Sheila Reimann, Joan Calvert, Zena Abbott, Jenny Hunt, Georgia Suiter, Kathleen Low, Erenora Puketapu-Hetet, Philipa Devonshire, Whiona Epiha, Ruth Castle. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND THE DOWSE ART MUSEUM, WELLINGTON





OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS, FITTS HAS UTILISED FABRIC AS A WAY OF INTERPRETING THE SOCIAL HISTORIES DREDGED UP FROM THE ARCHIVE, TREATING THESE STORIES IN A WAY THAT FOREGROUNDS THEIR 'FEELING' NATURE AND CONNECTIONS TO HUMAN BODIES.

