



By Carmel Mackie

The Coral Reef Project

The core theme of my work is to combine texture, colour and movement, and to deliver unexpected results by experimenting with different materials and concepts

The Great Barrier Reef Project installation



A favourite question people often ask an artist is “how long did it take?” Well, for many of us it’s been a journey that has taken most of our lives. I started to sew at age seven, which introduced me to fabrics. In my 20s I was mainly painting using oil paints, watercolours and acrylics, and recently I undertook a course in Visual Arts where I was drawn to various printmaking processes. I now incorporate most of it into my work, such as fabric, paper, skeleton leaves and tea bags.

After I produced a body of work for an exhibition with four other artists, as part of my Advanced Diploma of Visual Arts through the Nepean Arts and Design Centre, I realised I had another seven weeks to creatively explore. I believed a three-dimensional object would add further depth to my work, and I was also keen to experiment with screenprinting.

“ the result[is]... something that creates curiosity and has a story to tell”



The bodice in progress



As I was playing with ideas, I discovered a delicate dress sculpture by a Japanese artist which reminded me of a coral reef – I had found my inspiration!

I wanted my piece to represent not only the natural and environmental threats to the Great Barrier Reef, but also the human element that affects it, which is why it has the dress shape. The making process involved a couple of firsts for me, screenprinting and 3D sculpture!

I wanted the skirt to be sheer and I found some muslin I thought would work. I pinned and sewed the cloth to a modified umbrella frame so that it fitted the shape and then developed a screen with two

sizes of the coral image, then I mixed my inks and was ready to print.

I had imagined that the sea fan coral would start at the top of the sculpture in red and progress down the skirt in pink, overlapped with white. It took me several weeks of printing to get the desired effect.

The stand-alone bodice was next. For this I borrowed a mannequin and wrapped it in plastic. The bodice was assembled by coating pieces of screenprinted muslin with at least 10 coats of PVC glue (I lost count how many) and four layers of fabric over a five-day period. I designed as I went, and it looked a bit steampunk!

To bring the processes together, I hung the installation up using fishing line, which was much easier than

A close up of the dress, showing the sheerness of the skirt



A close up of the base, with the crushed cement blocks

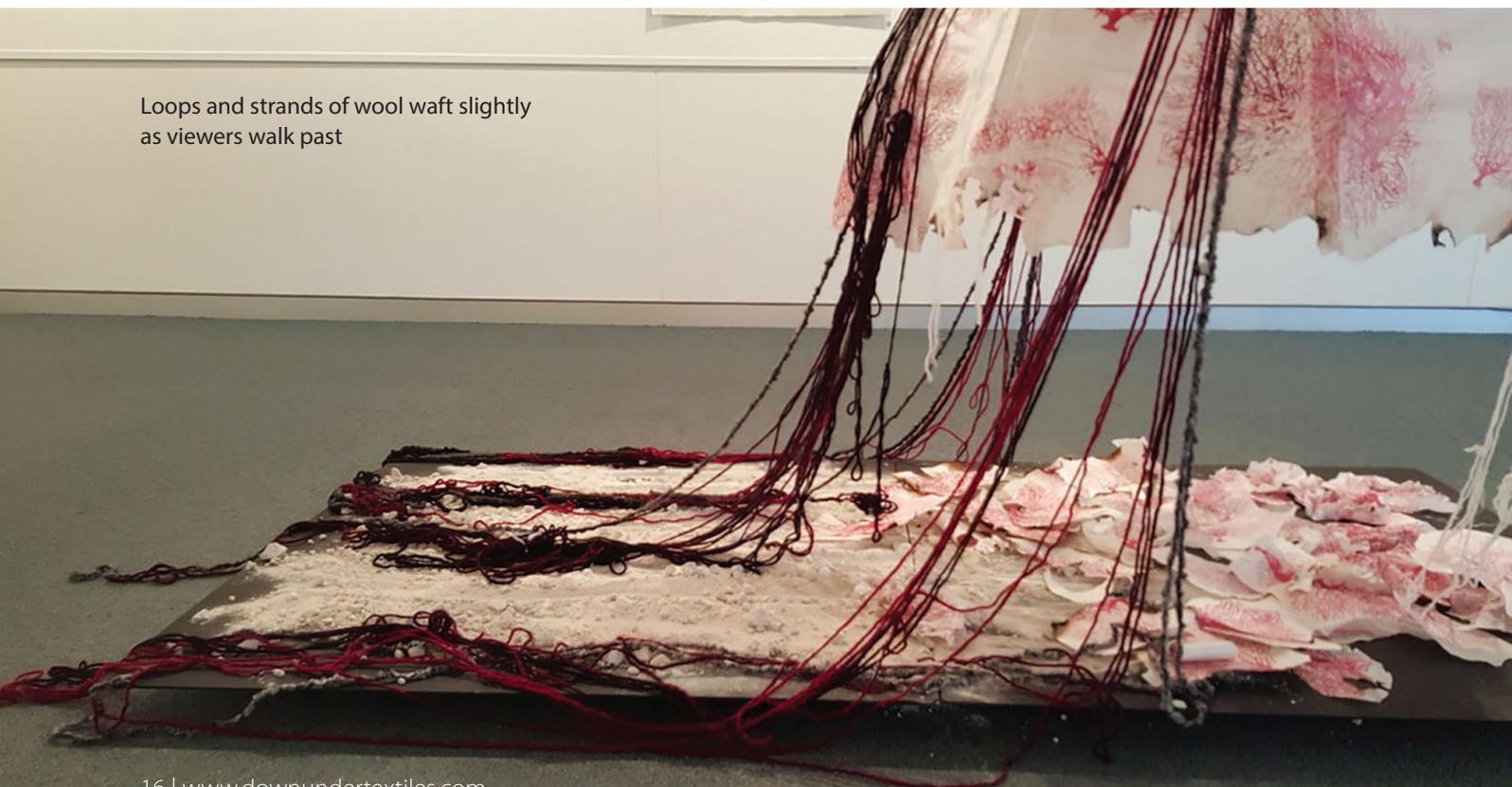
I'd first thought. Then the board on the floor was covered in 30 pieces of screenprinted coral, burnt around the edges, and for extra effect a crushed cement block was added to symbolise the death of the coral which visually anchored the installation. I needed embellishments to give extra drama and dimension so I wound three

different wool textures and colours around the centre of structure, above the skirt. I extended the strands to the side and back and continued looping wool from the outer edges of the board and back to the centre to suggest the Reef's struggle to survive. As the viewer walks around the work the wool moves slightly, transforming the piece from a

dress sculpture into a three-dimensional human-like creature!

I feel that all the elements have combined well to produce the result I was looking for, which is to emphasise the threats to the coral reef in a unique way, and to deliver something that creates curiosity and has a story to tell.

Loops and strands of wool waft slightly as viewers walk past





Screenprinted coral pieces
burnt around the edges,
symbolising destruction

See more...

Carmel utilises a variety of materials in her art. Visit her website at www.carmelmackie.com to see other pieces she has created

The screen used to print the coral design

