

SAS SERIES

Severine Costa



Figure 1. Severine Costa, *Put Together* (November 2014), performance, making the *Cumulus* necklace, involving 17 hours of performance (two hours a day). V Space, Robertson Library, Dunedin. Photo credits: Ted Whitaker.

I am passionate about adornment in all its forms. My interests are mainly focussed on issues around identity, analysing different aspects of its construction, its reception and potential for deception. The jewellery object is a bridge; it occurs in the 'in-between' space, that awkward space filled with opportunities to modulate the way in which people perceive you. Using performance, jewellery-making, make-up and drawing, the repetition and accumulation of simple gestures, marks, signs and objects are all significant aspects of a practice that becomes therapeutic. For example, with my works *Cumulus* and *Put Together* (both 2014), the making process expressed the urge to methodically put things together in an obsessive attempt to tidy, to attain order, to fill the void.

My work is a study of the chronic anxiety I suffer from, and presents an analysis of how it affects my emotions, thoughts and actions. I intend to express visually the instinctual protection systems put in place by my mind for survival when confronted with the urge or need to fit into my social environment.



Figure 2. Severine Costa, *Cumulus* (2014), SITE Graduating Student Exhibition, November 2014, and Objectspace, "Best In Show 2015," Auckland, April–May 2015. Photo credits: Alex Lowell-Smith. *Cumulus* has also been used as a prop for a dance performance, *The Instance of Getting Up*, in *Pick-A-Path: Dance in the City*, Dunedin Fringe Festival 2015.

I usually try to describe these awkward situations by drawing on the connotative aspect of the materials I use. The objects I make embody the duality of these situations and hint at the idea of a price to pay, a sacrifice to make. With most of my jewellery pieces, haptic memory is crucial, as it unravels the meaning of the work. For example, *Choker#2* is soft and beautiful, almost attractive on the outside, but dangerous and painful for the wearer. This speaks about the urge I have to please people, even when it means that I will be the most inconvenienced.

Cumulus is ambivalent too. It protects and provides the wearer with a comfortable cloud of almost-nothingness in order to get away from the real world and find peace in a dreamy nonconfrontational environment. It shines in the sunlight and is soft and pleasant to touch. At the same time, it obstructs sight and movement, becomes tangled and weighs on the wearer's sense of capacity. Its white is almost clinical, and its structure is fragile and forces the wearer to be constantly cautious and careful before making a move.

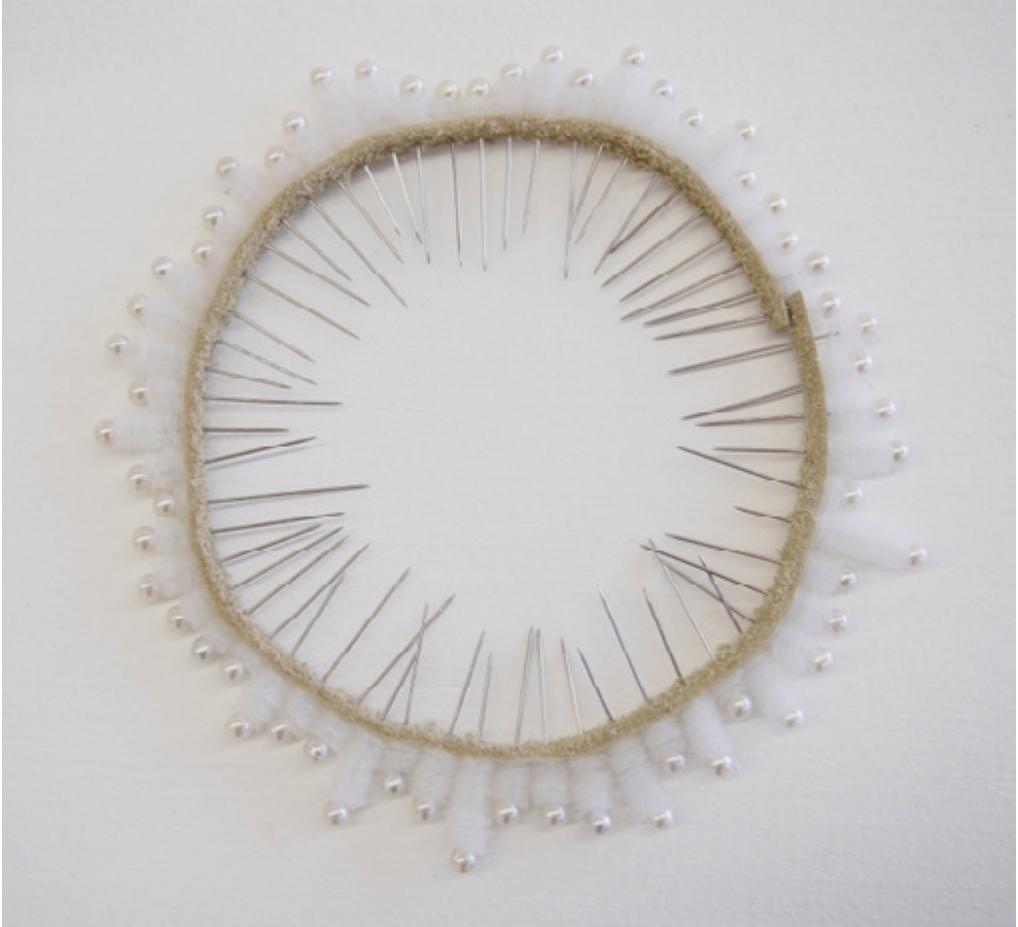


Figure 3. Severine Costa, Choker#2 (2015), "ID2K16," a group show curated by Hana Aoake, Blue Oyster Art Project Space, Dunedin, April 2015. Photo credits: Motoko Kikkawa.

Lately, I have been very interested in the power of performance, and have experimented with the notion of affect, especially as a way of addressing mental illness (depression and anxiety) and feminist concerns. *The Instance of Getting Up*, a dance performance – part of *Pick-A-Path: Dance in the City*, organised by the Gasp Collective for the 2015 Dunedin Fringe Festival – also used *Cumulus* as a prop. The performance consisted of my friend Miriam and I, entangled in the necklace. The two of us represented contradictory forces in action, so that the performance became a metaphor for the anxious mind. Walking slowly up a staircase, Miriam pulled me along with the necklace, struggling and crawling on the floor behind her, thus recreating the mental debate between reason and emotion during the 'instance' of getting up.

Another performance, *In Store Makeovers* – part of "ID2K16," a group show curated by Hana Aoake at the Blue Oyster Art Project Space in April 2015 – also staged this 'mental debate.' My friends Alannah Kwant and Kimmi Rindel, two of the Fresh 'n Fruity girls, acted an application of make-up, mirroring each other's actions as if one of them was the reflection of the other. (A video of the performance is accessible on the Blue Oyster website.) Throughout the performance, the application of make-up becomes increasingly hectic, until one of the actors breaks the cycle by throwing her eyeliner on the ground. The performance highlighted contradictory feelings about

the application of make-up: enacting femininity can be both empowering and alienating; it can result in feelings of satisfaction and confidence, but sometimes with a tinge of "I am not enough myself."

I also worked on a video for the group show *Title Title What's a Title*, at Yes Collective in Auckland, curated by Hana Aoake and Mya Middleton, in July 2015. It all started with a Google document that brought together a group of artists from around the world, discussing difficulties women face on a daily basis – within the art world, within their school or work environments, and so on. The exhibition showcased a work by each participant addressing these issues. I know the work I contributed would not have been made without this dialogue; like a big critique session, the conversations were inspiring and supportive, and I loved the collaborative aspect of it.

A NOTE ON FRESH 'N FRUITY

Fresh 'n Fruity is an all-female collective, physical space and social media spectacle based in New Zealand. Fresh 'n Fruity was co-founded by Zach Williams and Hana Aoake in 2014. The collective now consists of Severine Costa, Kimmi Rindel and Alannah Kwant, and is directed by Mya Middleton and Hana Aoake. With bases in both Dunedin and Auckland, the collective is involved in pop-up projects and is constantly seeking to work as a collective – including challenging its own hierarchical structure. Critiquing corporatised social media is central to Fresh 'n Fruity's approach to exhibition-making. Fresh 'n Fruity is a reflection of lifestyle imagery. It is a simulacrum of capitalist ideals and the problems within the art world.

Fresh 'n Fruity is intended to offer a challenge to the white cube gallery system, which is inherently faux progressive and is part of the same power structures which operate within corporate spheres. Fresh 'n Fruity is an appropriation, a copy, and will never be concerned with being 'original' because originality does not exist. Fresh 'n Fruity came into being as a response to issues around branding and lifestyle imagery and the way corporate motives find their way into the art world. It has morphed into a bridging space, offering young women the chance to gain skills and experience by having shows and hosting them. Fresh 'n Fruity aims to create space for people who are both excluded and exploited within the art world and art market, especially under a neo-capitalist framework.

Severine Costa graduated with a Bachelor of Visual Arts (majoring in contemporary jewellery) at the Dunedin School of Art, 2014.