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DARN THOSE MICROLEPIDOPTERA!

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## DARN THOSE MICROLEPIDOPTERA!

Philippa Hoogsteden Casey

This piece forms part of a reflection on a narrative-styled surface design and fabric manipulation project, exploring the life cycle of the moth and its connections to textile waste.

The sun is beginning to rise and sitting quietly at the top of the door frame is a moth. I raise my hand instinctively to swipe it away, but stop mid-strike. The intricate symmetrical spot pattern, combined with striped ridges over the wings, draw me in. Why, I think to myself, do we humans have this automatic reaction to eradicate those insects we regard as pests?

"Pest: a destructive insect or other animal that attacks food, livestock, crops, etc." The etc for me is the eating of cellulose-rich textiles much beloved of us humans and utterly irresistible to one of nature's decomposers, the moth.

### NATURAL DAMAGE

I will readily admit my heart sinks when I catch a glimpse of small brown moths fluttering anywhere near my precious vintage silks and wools – but the use of toxic chemicals and/or discarding damaged fabrics seems a much worse prospect. Viewing the articles in my personal 'to-repair basket' and considering the amount of varying, old, stained, holey or unfinished textiles at my local op shop inspired me to translate these thoughts into a physical textile that explored these connections.

As humans we nurture, use and appreciate some families of moths which create natural fibres like silk, yet fear and loathe others that are fulfilling their life cycle and place on our planet, contributing to the processes of age and decay – something we have difficulty in viewing as beautiful. I am going to confront this fear of the moth and focus on their beauty through research, observation and fabric applications, to restitch us together, accepting, embracing and potentially using the 'damage' inflicted by moths.

### RESTITCH US TOGETHER

Making this narrative textile developed in several stages. The first was the epiphanic idea sparked by looking closely at a stained, unfinished tapestry, a moth-eaten blanket and some forgotten hand-crocheted squares, and thinking how I could intercept this craft and homeware waste stream and incorporate it into garments for a new life.

By studying textile works and processes utilised by artist Sue Stone, who uses stitch and material texture to compose allegorical and personal stories, and Cheryl Martin, who works with old materials with patination and a past and layers them with significant text, sewing and fabric applications, I was impelled to start my own creative journey.

The last stage, and the most interesting and challenging one, was incorporating the reclaimed textiles, which are integral to my design focus. Care, respect, investigation and a slow, considered approach became important when working with damaged or unique handmade items of considerable age. Planning and testing new skills and experimenting thoroughly before action was vital. Felting parts of the wool, further fraying of existing holes to mimic hairs on the caterpillar's body, accentuating existing yellowing stains on the wool using natural dyes, and creating

texture and text via machine- and hand embroidery were all used, among other surface applications. This process developed a catalogue of experiences and a creative resource for me to reflect on and repeat in a multitude of ways.

## TACTILE MEMORIES OF TIME

My narrative of the moth's connection to humans is complete but, as with the moth's life cycle, the processes of exploration and creative experimentation will continue. I have learnt that crafting skills is an ongoing process and I have developed an habitual methodology of trials and sampling, the outcomes of which, both positive and negative, inform us how to reach the best design outcome.

For me, textiles hold tactile memories of time, place of origin, an experience, resources and the skills of the people who crafted and created them. This can be explained by phenomenology – our experiences are connected to our memories. I would like to challenge my own and others' preconceived notions of perfection, beauty and the life of cloth by keeping textiles out of landfills, recreating them into clothing that highlights their previous life through artistic fabric manipulation, be it stitch or print, for a longer cycle of use.

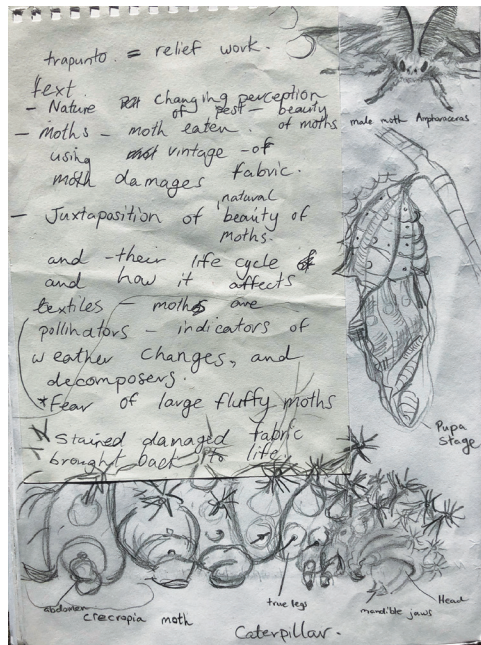


Figure 1. Workbook page.



Figure 2. Textile developed in response to research, practice and process.

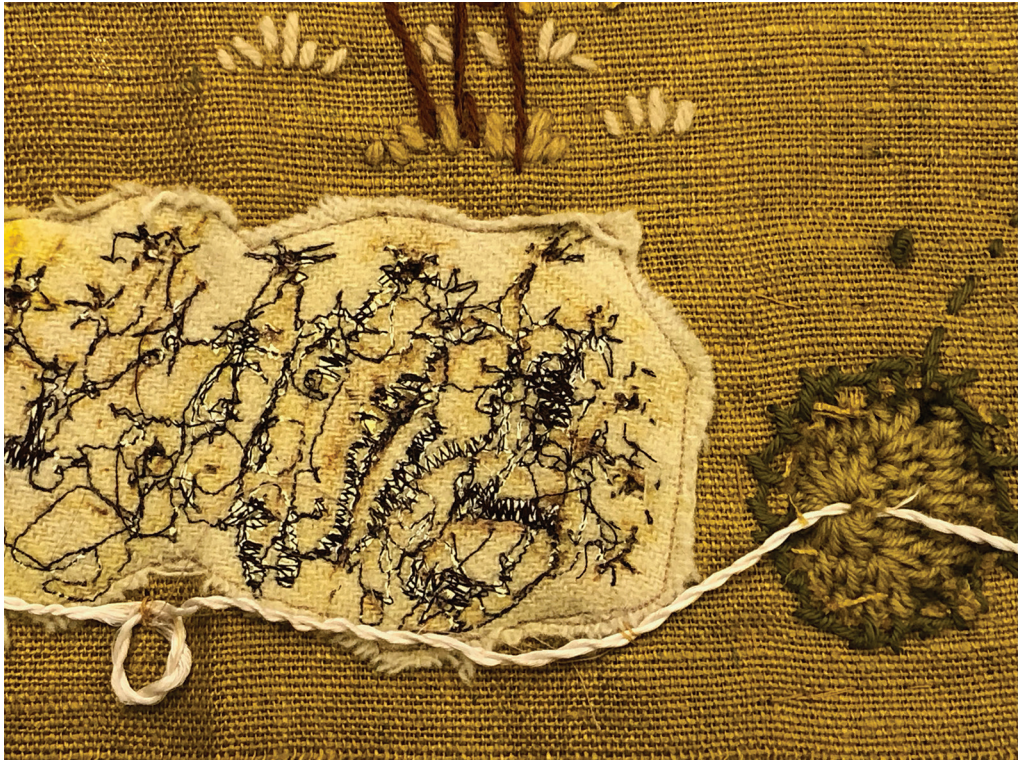


Figure 3. Close up of of stitches on textile development.

## BEAUTIFUL DECAY

In Aotearoa we have a moth known as the pūriri or ghost moth, which Māori consider a spirit of the ancestors returning to visit their descendants. Flying through the forest it lays its eggs, then dies. The mokoroa or larvae eat the sap of the pūriri trees, leading to their demise, falling and decaying onto the forest floor. There is a Māori saying that tells of this small moth grub able to fell the giant pūriri tree, teaching us that little things can have a significant impact (Haami, 2007). With this in mind, I will reconsider the negative implications of words like 'inconsistencies,' 'flaws,' 'stains,' 'pilling,' 'holes,' 'damage' as I seek to re-imagine other ways to accept, enhance and embrace them in future design projects.

**Philippa Hoogsteden Casey** is studying for a Bachelor of Design (Fashion) at Te Pūkenga / Otago Polytechnic. Philippa's inspiration and influences reflect her love of textile surface design and manipulation of fibre and fabric. She is also interested in exploring the creative links between crafted fabrics and contemporary fashion design.

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