

*The moods of the coastline  
are interpreted in Ailie  
Snow's Apparent  
Horizons series.*

## Ailie Snow

RAGGED, TORN, STAINED, DISCARDED — THE RAW MATERIALS OF AILIE SNOW'S CLOTH AND STITCH WORKS HAVE DEFINITELY SEEN BETTER DAYS.

**S**he has even been known to bury her silk fabric, or to wrap it with rusty nails, and otherwise encourage degradation as part of the process of adding history to her stories in cloth.

'It's really hard to say what I do,' she says. 'I use cloth and stitch to tell a story — in lots of different ways.' How about textile poet? That's what writer Jeanette DeNicolis Meyer calls Ailie, and it sums up the multi-layered, essential nature of her work.

The *Ladies* series (pages 190 and 191), of which she has made around 50 over several years, fitted around other projects, uses ethereal shapes, layered and stitched, of printed and torn scraps that evoke a mood, season, or the faintest whisper of someone else's story, to convey the Lady of the title she chooses. That they are headless matters not at all. And the

word Lady itself — rejected by feminists — is loaded with allusion, from courtly love poetry to Shakespeare, adding to the potential meaning.

Supporting and underpinning this practice are Ailie's visual journals and fabric books, which develop her observational side and feed the more formal stories. She has been compiling these stacks of thick accretions — some incorporating plaster so the pages crackle as they are turned — for the last eight years, an extension of the written journals she has kept as far back as she can remember.

Ailie's classes are in demand around New Zealand and occasionally overseas. Some classes are based on the book arts, some are about creating with cloth and stitch, and some combine both. Working from a home studio that looks out into trees, on the edge of a reserve, Ailie surrounds herself with an organised jumble of resources — fabric scraps from a quilter friend,



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*The Ladies series uses printed, torn, layered and stitched shapes to whisper stories – Lady caught in the web of winter (above) and Lady emerging from the woods of winter (right).*

remnants gifted at workshops, op-shop scarves, fabrics collected over the years, and lots of paper for her notebooks and diaries.

Ailie's 'Apparent Horizons' exhibition at te tuhi in early 2005 incorporated the contents of her quilter friend Louise's rubbish bag — handstitched onto canvas textured with gesso and paint — to communicate the moods and openness of the coastline.

A trained teacher, Ailie taught primary school in New Zealand and overseas before beginning her textile practice. 'I always loved art lessons and decorating the classroom and putting the children's work on the wall,' she says. While she enjoys reading and discussing papers and theses with friends who are involved in fine arts postgraduate studies, Ailie is not interested in more study herself for the moment. 'I'm more humanistic in my approach to my work. Some of that stuff is too far removed from work and life, and I'm into work and life.'

While she is now experienced in many textile forms — knitting, felting, paper and bookbinding among them — Ailie started out as a knitwear designer, knitting her designs by hand rather than machine, and she still stitches by hand only. 'I haven't used a machine in a long time. I'm not a quilter, I was never really happy using a sewing machine. I love the physical act of stitching; needle in, needle out.'

'I think it's important to love the process. Stitching is quite a meditative process, it allows you to be designing as you go, and be involved while you do it. The hands are doing it while the mind is creating the next bit — it's a journey.' ■