

ity cards, complete with signatures that went Sandberg later said: 'This for st praise I have ever had hic work.' However, there o attack the Central Civil that held records of the idents. The attack was essional, and almost all of conspirators were ecuted. He escaped and g. period Sandberg managed h his own private work, re a selection of exquisite klets that he produced d 1945. Each booklet had 60 pages using various and typefaces presented g, collage and d in doing so building later work. He ave them the collective ta *typografica*. ater catalogue and poster edelijk that dominates the lberg's characteristic use old colour and typography. d avant-garde for its ntred combinations of lence across the page with slab serif letterforms. is so essential to his s a canvas for print, but he l layout and type through rs of torn sheets that rk of his design work. layful and artistic moting the museum's y feels like it comes from derstanding and h the subject matter that e made fascinating ow to promote art gn. For example, there are ng the likes of Picasso, ríro using only typography vyweight artists as if they ould be a challenging a client today to agree to onal, but by no means oach. In doing so, the way at the Stedelijk e, the equally icon of Dutch graphic uwel. ginally developed his a culture of austerity. ed materials and printing almost contemporary urrent rise in popularity g and letterpress. a pioneer of design and uced a graphic approach today. London-based art director consultant

Below: Norma Cohen playing the character of Greta in the play *Yarning* at mac Birmingham

Spinning yarns with knitting

Yarning: A new play by Trevor Pitt
mac Birmingham
Thursday 7 April 2016

Reviewed by Emma Crichton-Miller

In a large room, 80 people sit in a circle. The circle is punctuated by five park benches that seem to have been knitted, each wearing a subtly different costume of undyed wool. The lights dim and Michael Tanner's atmospheric music steals through the space, as five women take their places on the benches and pick up their knitting. For the next hour the audience is held mesmerised, as one after another the women, encompassing an age range from 30 to 70, offer bursts of reminiscence, sometimes striding across the floor to animate the past, sometimes holding the room in suspense as some painful memory is relived.

Knitting is the thread. Gloria tells us about her grandmother and aunts

unweaving sweaters bought in jumble sales to knit new clothes. Greta was taught to knit – badly – by her great-aunt but relives for us instead the humiliation of her shamefully stitched domestic science apron. Betty followed her dream to farm sheep in Cumbria, and at one point dons a long purple and pink coat knitted from the tough yarn of Sandra, one of her 'motley' flock of rare breeds. Marion, wearing a delicate knitted shawl and hand-woven throw (credited in the programme to Rebecca Gallop), was taught to knit by an uncle, and turns to weaving for her livelihood after her boys have left home. Meanwhile Ashley, sent to a girls' grammar school where 'girls were supposed to be captains of industry', and dutifully excelling at science, abandons her research lab, first for travel in the Viking north and secondly for Glasgow and knitting, where she builds a new career teaching and inspiring other knitters.

Yarning, as you might imagine, bristles with metaphor: lives and generations are woven together, by stories, by love and by knitting, a skill passed down through the generations. And the play is animated also by gracefully choreographed dances for the women, which evoke the movements of knitting needles or hand looms. There is nothing sentimental about the production, however. As time passes, darker elements of the past emerge.

Gloria, born in the workhouse to an unmarried mother, was brought up by her grandmother, in a house near the pits where her grandfather worked; aged six, Greta was summarily handed over by her mother to her father's unmarried sister; Betty endures alongside her fellow sheep farmers the ravages of foot-and-mouth disease; Marion escapes a violent husband with her two boys, while Ashley's boyfriend was drawn to her knitting because his late mother had taught him to knit. The women do not look at each other. Knitting becomes an emblem of resilience, holding things together when all looks set to unravel, until the explosion of dancing and joy at the end.

The play, supported by the enterprising charity Craftspace, is an episode in what has become an ongoing developing artwork for its writer, the multidisciplinary artist and curator Trevor Pitt. Pitt had been taught to knit by his mother and aunts, on the Glebe Farm Estate in Birmingham, where he had been brought up. Ten years ago he invited them to knit a bench with him, to help them all reflect on this context of his upbringing. Out of this came the *Knitting Salon*, a project where Pitt travelled



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around the country knitting benches with different groups of people, but to his pattern, out of beautifully varied local yarns. Eight of these benches were exhibited in Birmingham in 2010. Funded by Craftspace, Pitt set off again up and down the country, this time recording the stories of women he had met through these knitting salons. Five have been woven deftly for this play.

There are times when the monologues threaten to become a little preachy – insisting on the value of craft, or offering almost a business model – but this is a small cavil in what is a sensitive, touching, truly collaborative work, rooted in making, whether what you knit is a sweater, a theatrical production, a family or an entire community.

Emma Crichton-Miller is a journalist and television producer specialising in the arts

Perceptions of the body beautiful

Undressed: A Brief History of Underwear

V&A, London SW7

16 April 2016 – 12 March 2017

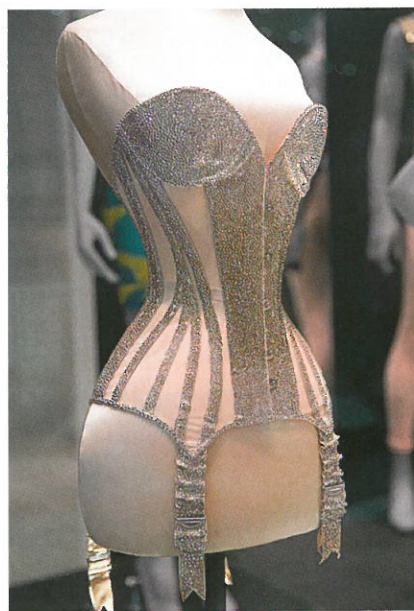
Reviewed by Karoline Newman

Undressed is a gripping and uplifting exhibition that peeks into a hidden world of the practical and provocative, revelling in a sensual guilty pleasure with academic explanation. Underwear and lingerie – things that no one mentions and everyone wants to talk about.

This is a show of two halves, not so much tops and bottoms as upstairs and downstairs. The lower level presents a loosely chronological narrative of underwear's function and 'shape-shifting' effects for men's and women's fashions of their day, categorised into Fashion, Health and Hygiene; Volume; Performance Underwear; and Support: Bras and Girdles. The upper level is quite literally a revelation: underwear as outerwear, with eye-catching designs for the catwalk, the boudoir and erotic fetishism. There are iconic items such as the sheer dress worn by Kate Moss in 1993 and Vivienne Westwood's 1989 leggings with mirror-glass fig leaf adornment.

But there is something faintly disconcerting about the fleshy prosthetic pink backdrops, pants on pedestals, corsets on columns and music that

Right: Crystal-embellished corset made for Dita Von Teese by Mr Pearl, 2011



tinkles away in the background. For a show that is devoted to the human shape it somehow lacks body.

Undressed charts the relatively recent history of underwear from the 1800s to the present day, taking into account material and manufacturing developments, technical innovation and craft. Its evolution matches the course of the Industrial Revolution and, to some extent, female emancipation as well. There are appalling X-rays of the impact of restrictive corsets and tight lacing; medical arguments from the Radical Dress Reformers; 1960s' bra-burning protests by Women's Libbers and sexually empowering lingerie courtesy of the sponsors – Agent Provocateur.

Personally, I wanted to draw a comparative timeline between historical events and what happened to underwear during such times as the World Wars (women working in munitions factories loosen their stays and Land Girls embrace freedom of movement), the introduction of talkie films (when rustling petticoats interfere with recording equipment and are replaced by slinky, satin-clad sirens) and the advent of the contraceptive pill leading to flirtatious lingerie designs. Instead, *Undressed* reflects social and cultural change under topics such as 'Hygiene and Comfort' and 'Revelation and Transformation'.

Often exhibitions of underwear concentrate solely on female garments, but *Undressed* also incorporates a comprehensive collection of male accoutrements designed to enhance the muscular and the masculine. The metrosexual man is just as likely to augment his physique with sporty shapewear and the contemporary equivalent of a codpiece in an uplifting

aussieBum as a woman will circumscribe her waist in Spanx.

The corset is still much in vogue among devotees such as Vivienne Westwood and Mr Pearl, who describes the process of creating a corset as 'an intimate collaboration between maker and wearer'. The couture corset-maker understands the body's anatomy and has the skill and empathy to realise each client's special requirements. Other designers such as Jean Paul Gaultier and Tom Ford's collections are clearly influenced by underwear structure. Dolce & Gabbana's 2013 *Winter Dress* even revitalises the corset.

Packaging and advertising its own cultural narrative promotes body hygiene, posture and hormonal balance. How times have changed from demure advertorials for bespoke fittings in women's journals and slogans like 'Men feel swell in boxer shorts to Wonderbra's 'Hello Boys' campaign. It's a sartorial memory lane.

Throughout the history of underwear and lingerie craft has had an important place. It is not only the skill of the cutter or the hand-sewing that there are the numerous other things too. Exquisite embroidery applied to chemise, bodices, garters and garters. Expensive hand-made lace detailing, sensual chiffon negligees and corsets. Petticoats feature drawn threadwork, appliqué and whitework embroidery. There is smocking for bodices and corsets for petticoats; and intricate steel boning for complex corsetry. Japanese shibari (meaning to tie) creates geometric patterns with ropes worn in fetish fashion. Carving whalebone basques as 'lovers' worn close to the heart. The slinky furniture maker and the blacksmith also play their part in bending and forging steel for crinolines and corsets. All of this was required before mechanisation, mass production and material innovation.

In fewer than 200 items, *Undressed* uncovers an enormous and diverse range of topics – function, sex, fashion. It tries to balance academic information with mild titillation – but somehow it remains an animation. This is not a blockbuster show in the vein of Alexander McQueen; it is demurely informative and educational. It may reignite debate about underwear as objectifying and demeaning, but as fashionable and empowering. If you decide, this show challenges our perceptions of the body beautiful in a manner that is upfront and personal. *Karoline Newman is co-author of 'Lingerie', published by Chartwell.*