

Statement of practice

“There is one masterpiece, the hexagonal cell, that touches perfection. No living creature, not even man, has achieved, in the centre of his sphere, what the bee has achieved in her own.”

(Preston, 2006, p.100).

I have an obsession with bees, perhaps inspired by my childhood memories of my father's beehives. I have many memories of my dad and the local beekeepers tending to our bees and supplying us with delicious honey. One memory which is both terrifying and beautiful, was when a swarm of thousands of bees gathered outside my bedroom window. These memories have influenced my fascination for bees, and their characteristics and aesthetics excite and inspire me, and have led to my choosing them as the theme for my practice.

My final degree show project consists of three interpretations of a beekeeper's suit. The suits represent the queen bee, the drone and the worker bee, and the piece is called “Mourning the Bees”. It is a fictional futuristic piece and, as the context is the extinction of bees, it conveys a funereal atmosphere.

This installation is executed through the media of dressmaking, multi-head embroidery and the hand-sewn techniques of honeycomb smocking and beading. The costume representing the queen bee is the most extravagant of the three as she is the largest bee and mother to all bees within the colony. (Hooper, 1991, p. 24) In line with the funereal theme, the inspiration for her costume was sourced from a variety of images from the 1800s depicting women in mourning.

The drone beekeeper suit adapts the original boiler suit pattern, however, it is made with a simple black cotton drill with no pockets or embellishments other than in the genital area to highlight the drone's role within the hive. The drone's only function in the hive is to mate

with the queen. (Hooper, 1991, p. 24) This part of the suit is embellished using the multi-head machine to create a honeycomb embroidery pattern, finished with hand-sewn beading.

As with the suit depicting the drone, the beekeeper suit representing the worker bee is also an adaptation of the original boiler suit. However, this suit is made in a diamond-patterned, gold and black quilted fabric and is embellished with hexagonal pockets. The worker bee's role is reflected in the raw finish of the garment, signifying that she is a woman at work.

Having some experience of theatre, I plan for these garments to be worn on stage in a play or musical called "Mourning the Bees". In the installation, the three figures will be accompanied by the sound of buzzing bees. I believe sound can grab people's attention, and the solo sound of bees will add to the dramatic effect of this installation.

The primary objective of this installation will be to encourage people to think about bees and to educate themselves about the importance of bees to human society. Going forward I envisage contacting a group such as the Federation of Irish Beekeepers Associations (FIBKA) to suggest a campaign to bring greater public awareness of the importance of bees to our way of life. For example, I could imagine using my costumes as a hook to catch the interest of secondary school students and tell them about the importance and endangerment of bees.

Hooper, T. (1991) *Guide to bees and honey*. 3rd edn. London: Blandford Press.

Preston, C. (2006) *BEE*. LONDON: Reaktion Books.