



Beneath

Margaret Ambridge

What happens when you chose to lay your head next to another? You both are changed, and a third emerges, 'the couple'.

Words spoken amongst the sheets are like charcoal marks on fabric, once spoken, once made, they cannot be undone or erased.

In *Beneath* as with her previous solo exhibition *'til death* Margaret Ambridge reflects on intimate conversation providing opportunities for people to talk to each other about the things that affect them most, that matter most, but are so often avoided.

Margaret says the original premise seemed straightforward; while photographing them, ask couples about their relationships, have them record names and memories as rice paper notes posted anonymously into a 'ballot box', and then make drawings based on the conversations, on gifted and found sheets and pillows.

The exhibition itself is a forest of fabric, forcing the viewer to navigate the gallery space physically; you can't just wander past and look, then move on. The default voyeuristic gaze of the observer breaks down, more is demanded. The work poses very personal and at times uncomfortable questions.

Margaret's drawings are a vehicle through which connections are made, links to past experiences, current pains and pleasures, doubts and avoidances. And what of the 'moral compass'? Who defines it, where does it point? Here it appears multivalent.



*"It's made me insecure about aging,
having to compete with all those young perky things"*



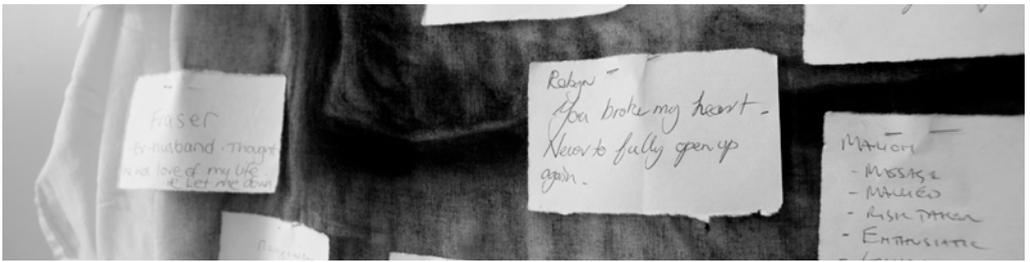
The kiss 1 | 2019 | charcoal on gifted antique pillow case | 78cm x 59cm

Cover *Agony and ecstasy 4* (detail) | 2019 | charcoal on cotton bed sheet | 233cm x 255cm
Above *Agony and ecstasy 4 ghost* (detail) | 2019 | charcoal on rice paper | 150cm x 250cm





One of those dates that you don't want to end
2019 | charcoal on cotton bed sheet | 227cm x 257cm



When making the drawings and having the conversations Margaret says her relationship with the participants and the works expanded beyond anything she had imagined. Some of the conversations were challenging, some painful. Subjects at times became a third voice, a judgement over her shoulder '*I don't look like that!*' But these are not portraits of people as they see themselves, they are vulnerable unfamiliar views seen from above, or alongside, as lovers see us. They are portraits of relationships and experiences; they are reflections of self that may not sit easily, and yet we are loved in spite of our self image.

Margaret says the fabrics also made their own demands. Unlike paper, charcoal on cloth can't be erased or easily reworked. The scent of sleepers past emerged with the constant rubbing, weaker fabrics collapsed, and broke, stronger ones fought back, defying the gorgeous greys Margaret searches for with a basic black stick of charcoal. Yet she continues to eschew the emphatic looking for nuance.

Time constantly demands attention in this work. The clean handkerchief you can't be without on your first date, a date with someone you'd actually met, is replaced by snippets of chat and filtered photographs on Tinder, and an agitated phone that constantly fills the void previously occupied by imagination.

- Top *Memories' bed* (detail) | 2019 | rice paper notes, charcoal on cotton bed sheet
- Left *Handkerchiefs* | 2019 | charcoal on gifted handkerchiefs | size variable
- Right *It's a girl* (front) | 2019 | charcoal on antique cotton pillow case | 72cm x 72cm
- Centre *Agony and ecstasy 3* | 2019 | charcoal on antique cotton bed sheet | 210cm x 250cm



Installation | 2019 | charcoal on cotton bed sheets | size variable

Ghost images, the result of charcoal forced through the fabric's warp and weft are relationships' doppelgangers. Memories, written as notes by the subjects, float off a drawn bed escaping into the world. Their phrases also linger elsewhere, mingled with the ghostly residues, as projections on a suspended mattress.

It is a testament to Margaret's openness that so many agreed to be part of a project like this and shared so much.

Beneath is an intimate, intricate fabric of relationships, the richer for the generosity of those who joined, and for the complexity Margaret has drawn from their contributions.

Words, photographs, design—Mark Fitz-Gerald



19 July - 16 August 2019

68–72 Gibson Street
BOWDEN SA 5007

Wed–Sat 11:00–4:00

08 7231 1974 www.praxisartspace.com.au

Exhibition Opened by Andrew Purvis
Curator—Adelaide Central Gallery

www.margaretambridge.com.au