




THE EMPORER'S NEW CLOTHES

As a new media artist, Deborah Clare West produces works which are crisp, aesthetically beautiful, and forever thought-provoking. Through her art-making, she embraces the meeting place between the visual arts and forms of new technology. The results? Rich visual metaphors of our own cultural history, particularly in relation to themes of female labour within the fashion arena.

What separates West from numerous other artists working in this newly developing area is that while many focus on the actual technology they use, removing the traces of the artists' hand from their work, West continues to focus on the actual process of art-making. Exploring the history of craftsmanship and textiles, her practice (often relying on repetition and monotonous labour for its completion) acts as a commentary to the long-spanning role of women in the production of fashion garments. It does so by mimicking the painstaking and arduous tasks that was part of their daily lives.

Even a final two-dimensional image attempts to delve into the little known participation of women in textile production during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This occurs through West's use of varied forms of new technology — high resolution scanners, lasers, digitally manipulated imagery — to comment on their silent abuse for the sake of beautiful garments and other forms of decorative textiles.

With an extensive portfolio (West recently won an international design competition, has exhibited both locally and overseas, and has a resume that reads like Webster's English dictionary) perhaps the most articulate example of this is 'Emporors New Weave' (2004), pictured.

Taking the physical act of weaving as well as the finished result as metaphor, this particular example of her work saw West take twenty-two lasers, setting them into cut perspex. These shafts of light were precisely positioned along the perspex frame in order to mimic the appearance of woven textiles; the result being a unique confrontation to the glossed veneer of the fashion industry. The work in this sense acts as a visual representation for issues of enforced labour, male and female power, and economic regulation underlying the history of fashion. That, and it makes for a pretty picture. A bit like fashion itself, really. *Raymond Thomas Hines* 

Emperor's New Weave, 2004. Photography by Deborah Clare West.