

Sera Waters, *Flee to Haven*,  
2009, wool, crewel, thread,  
landscape products cotton  
fabric, velvet, stuffing. Photo:  
Michal Kusarek.



### Craft'n Disaster: Sera Waters

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Textile artist Sera Waters freely and contemporaneously uses crafts stereotypically assigned to an aged and gendered territory occupied by nannas. Methods of needlework, longstitch, tapestry, embroidery and patchwork that have filtered down the generations form the core of her practice. However, unlike the ingrained depictions of assorted nosegays, petite birds and fruit arrangements that so frequently adorn dainty doilies, cushions and quilts, Waters introduces darker subject matter centred around threats, predators and victims, which assist in altering the customary roles and stories of living-room linens and homely haberdashery.

On one hand it would seem Waters' work is a homage to craft, in that she draws on the genre's numerous techniques and executes them with extreme proficiency. The flip side is that she rejects the safe and agreeable decorative themes typically found in such works. Waters' style goes beyond mere ornamental design. She employs scene and narrative, drama and darkness, reality and fiction, diptych and series, working at all times to challenge viewers' perceptions and expectations pertaining to soft furnishings.

*Craft'n Disaster* presents a setting of quasi-domesticity. There exists an allusion to the cosy and familiar items that are found in the home, or perhaps a grandmother's home, yet there is an undercurrent of foreboding, where Waters introduces subtle and overt elements of disaster into her work. Feelings of disquiet are heightened also by a dim, flickering light in the exhibition space.

A sense of raw fear is evinced in the paired work, *Flee to Haven*, 2009, in which a highly-expressive tapestried kingfisher on one cushion makes for safety in the log-hollow of a complementary wood-grain fabric cushion. It flees an unaccounted-for explosion that blasts beyond its wings. In *Sandbag for the Home: Drowning Livestock*, 2009, sequin-covered cattle trying to survive rising floodwaters risk vanishing altogether as they stand dangerously close to the cascading edge of the work.

Extending the techniques used in her more recently exhibited artworks, Waters's *Nasty Magpie* series, 2009, is an exquisite example of her delicate needlework. The fineness is offset by theme, which in this case seeks to expose the predatory characteristics of this iconic, black-and-white South Australian bird. Here the combination of goldwork, beading, felt, sequins, cotton and glow-in-the-dark thread is used to create six scenes on found doilies that the artist has dyed black. Waters works over the doilies' pre-existing motifs and embellishments in an attempt to reject the bonny bluebirds and carolling canaries, the sweet cherry clusters and baskets of bouquets. The magpies are depicted in poses many of their human victims can relate to – swooping, running and retreating – and represent ornithological truths that speak of sharp beaks, careless claws and some very nasty injuries.

Whether malicious beaded birds, longstitched threats of tornado and fire, or a distant warning of felt-made smoke, Waters turns traditional craft imagery and media on their heads. Tree trunks are sewn out of cushion, decorative throw rugs are exchanged for practical fire blankets, and friendly, sand-filled door snakes become more than just windbreakers.

[www.serawaters.com.au](http://www.serawaters.com.au)

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