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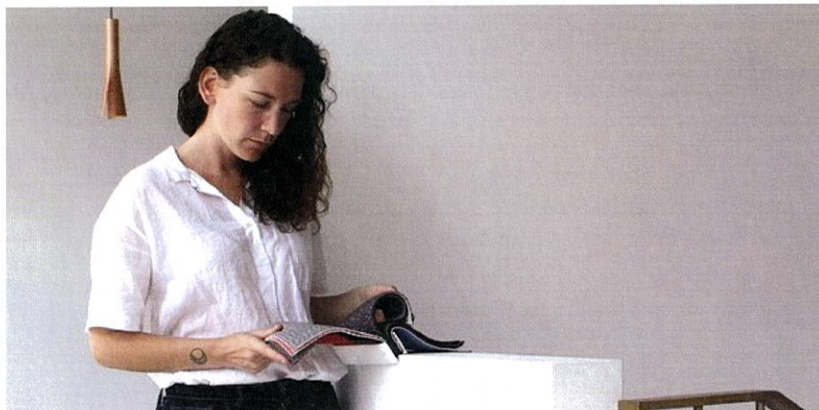
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The New Zealand Herald

Designs child's play for artist

By Emily Norman - Wairarapa Times-Age



Former Featherston woman Caroline Stephen will exhibit her textile art at Munich's Internationale Handwerksmesse in Germany. PHOTO/SUPPLIED

An artist who grew up playing in the wool sheds of a Kahutara sheep farm has taken textile design to the next level, using a digital knitting machine to create merino fashions.

Caroline Stephen, a masters student at Auckland University of Technology, moved from South Wairarapa when she was 9 but said she often wonders if her origins have influenced what she does now - "all those years playing in the wool".

She was selected to exhibit her textile art at Munich's Internationale Handwerksmesse from February 21 until March 1, in the Talente category, one of Europe's most prestigious showcases for emerging talent in design, technology, craft and object art.

"The collection I will exhibit is what I call a speculative investigation into a future materiality and new modes of craft," she said.

"So the work suggests concepts about what it might mean to make and wear clothes in 20 to 50 years and how we will draw on craft and material knowledge and integrate that with the digital technology we have, whatever that might be at the time."

Stephen's work is digitally knitted on a Shima Seiki Japanese knitting machine.

With the machine, she programmes a knit structure into a computer that fits alongside the machine and the machine "digitally knits it".

Stephen said it was similar to how a 3D printer works especially when compared with some of her "whole garment programmed designs", which are knitted seamlessly from the hem up.

"So the hem will come out first and then it literally knits the garment, then the sleeves," she said.

"Knitting this way is interesting because you only use the yarn you need and this eliminates yarn waste because you're not cutting anything."

All of her designs are made with merino wool, which is used for the layer closest to the skin.

"I also use a yarn called pemotex which is a European yarn used mainly for industrial applications like for safety garments, so it's not usually used for fashion.

"What this material does is it shrinks and hardens so it distorts the wool in parts.

"It sounds kind of weird when I explain it out loud but when I was doing it, it all made perfect sense to me."

Stephen said she was "very excited" to exhibit her work in Germany thanks to Creative New Zealand funding, and is thankful for the opportunity for her textile design to become internationally recognised.

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