



Broken flowers

A FASHION AND TEXTILES GRADUATE OF UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY, GEMMA ANASTASIOU EXTRACTS THE PIGMENT FROM FRESH FLOWERS TO CREATE COLOUR ON CLOTH

WRITER *Rebecca Howden* PHOTOGRAPHER *Ellis Parrinder*

Fresh flowers are smashed with a hammer, stamped into patterns on hemp, silk and organic cotton. Other blooms are seared with heat, bonding them to the fabric, while others are trapped in between layers of cloth to wither and decay.

The processes sound somewhat violent, but Gemma Anastasiou's graduate collection for her Bachelor of Design in Fashion and Textiles at the University of Technology, Sydney is the embodiment of softness and delicacy, with elegant, flowing garments all constructed from natural fibres, given colour and texture through these creative dyeing techniques.

"At its core, the collection is based around the values of the slow fashion movement, whereby there is a return to a heightened awareness of the entire design process," Anastasiou explains. "There is a strong sense of craftsmanship, with much of the knitting being by hand as well as the other textiles developed in a way that it is near impossible to replicate identically, creating unique one-off garments."

The genesis of the *Destructed Bloom* collection was in Anastasiou's research into environmentally-friendly ways of creating colour in fabric, as alternatives to the chemical-intensive dye methods commonly used in the industry. One book in particular, *Eco Colour* by India Flint, inspired her to explore techniques using plants and flowers.

All the fabrics in the collection were left undyed, so that the delicate colour patterns come purely from the stamping and bonding methods. "To the best of my ability, I tried to source all materials from sustainable sources," she says. "I did research into the better fibres and tried to find suppliers who focused on eco-friendly, organic and ethical fabrics. The knitted pieces in the collection were made entirely from alpaca yarn, all sourced from Australian farmers."

Through the visual metaphor of the flower, Anastasiou's designs seek to explore the relationship between nature and fashion. "The whole collection has become a symbolic representation of the impact the fashion industry is having on people and the

environment," she says. "On the one hand fashion can be very beautiful. What the consumer doesn't see is the negative impacts that are caused during the production of these fashions; the chemicals, the waste and the pollution which impact on the workers involved as well as the environment."

"The use of the fresh flower to generate colour and texture through smashing it with a hammer or bonding it with heat into the cloth is actually quite horrific, but from a distance all you see is the beauty which it has created."

The unique properties of the textiles also reflect ideas of change and life cycles – something that is inherent in both nature and fashion. "Particularly in the pieces with the embedded petals on the fabric, with time they are intended to age, change colour, drop off and eventually decay the fabric," Anastasiou explains. "When the garment is no longer of value to the wearer, the idea is that with time the garments will decompose back into the earth, completing a cradle-to-grave life cycle."

LEFT: Gemma Anastasiou smashes flowers with a hammer, extracting the colour and creating elegant and unique garments. **ABOVE:** Anastasiou's *Destructed Bloom* collection explores techniques using plants and flowers.