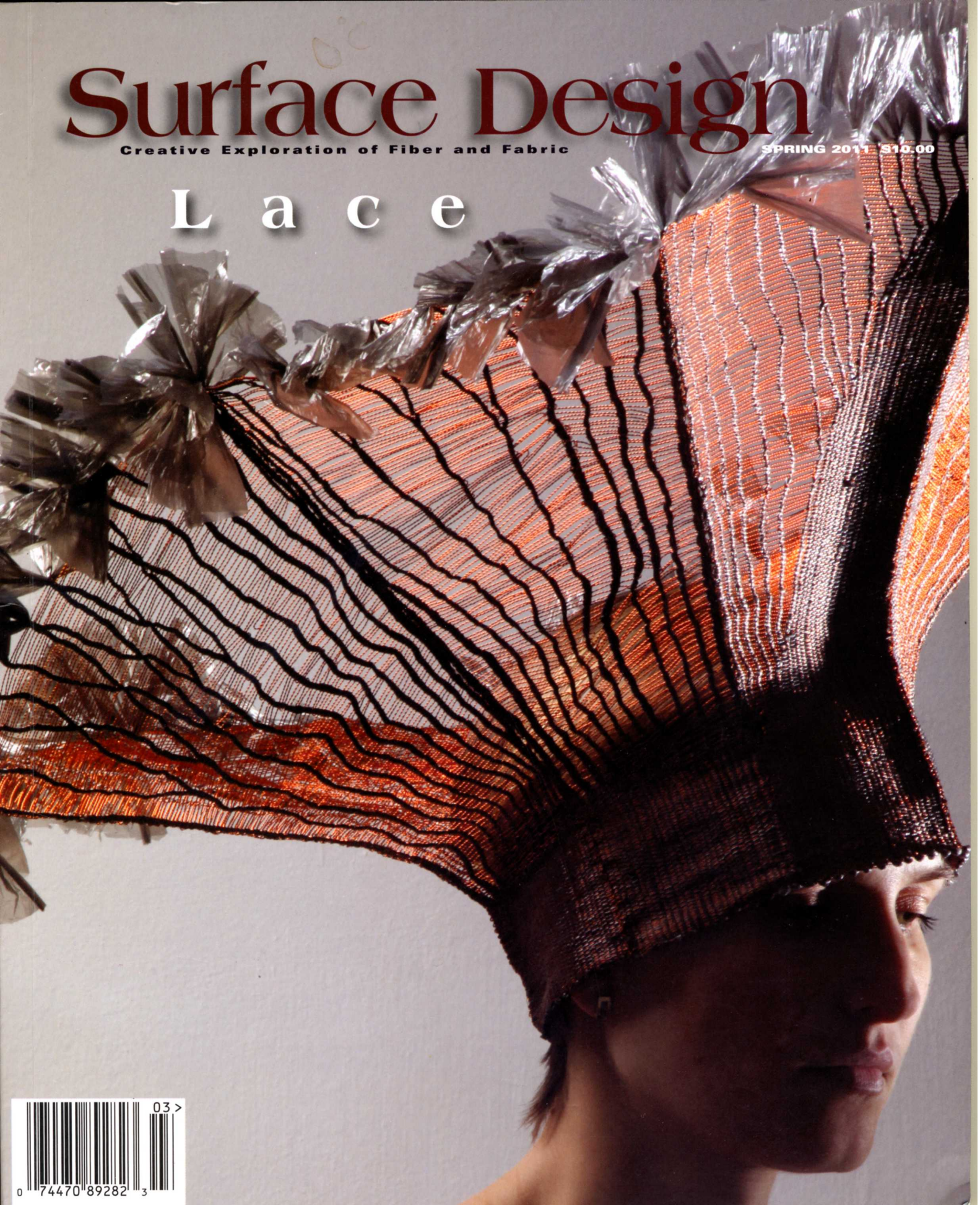


# Surface Design

Creative Exploration of Fiber and Fabric

SPRING 2011 \$16.00

## L a c e





# Love Lace!

Seeking Lace's Outer Limits

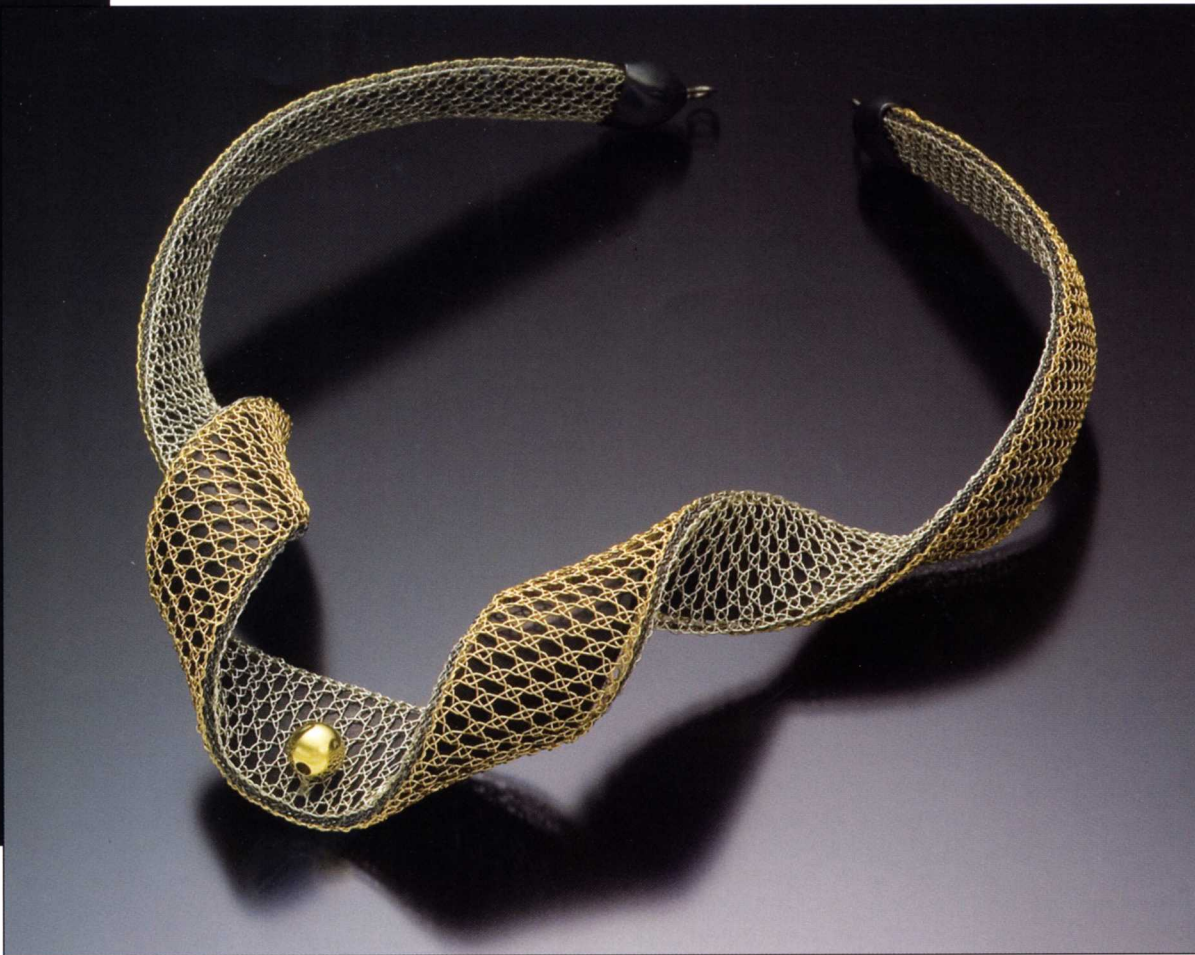
If you happen to visit the Lace Study Centre at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, Australia, you might find yourself seated before a small pillow covered with a cascade of pinned-down threads with the loose end of each one curled around a bobbin. Most likely, a member of the staff will demonstrate a sequence of crossing and twisting one thread over another and then turn the process over to you. Soon you will notice a shift in the quality of time: traditional lacemaking pulls one into a quiet, calming, unhurried zone that feels allied to the pace of cellular development. Like living tissue, the lace fabric grows as one gesture follows another.

Often we think of lacemaking's patient progress as leisure activity from another era. The center, however, is devoted to keeping lace alive today. In addition to offering visitors a brief encounter with process, the volunteer staff welcomes textile historians, scholars, students, and anyone else with an interest in researching techniques, materials, makers, or the rich history and cultural relevance of lacemaking.\* Resources include 300 significant examples of bobbin, needle, embroidered, crocheted, knotted, and knitted lace from around the world. These have been culled from 3000 items, gathered over the past hundred years and dating from the 15th century to the present, in the museum's lace collection.

The center's commitment to lace extends beyond fostering knowledge of past achievements. A series of triennial International Lace Award competitions, initiated by Rosemary Shepherd, the previous lace curator, has inspired contemporary artists to find fresh approaches that bring lacemaking into the twenty-first century. *Love Lace!*, the latest in the exhibition cycle, opens this summer. After the finalists had been selected, curator Lindie Ward generously put together the following preview for the *Surface Design Journal*. Since many of the works accepted from proposals were still in progress at press time, accompanying images include not only finished pieces but also design proposals or pieces similar to those being made for the show. (Editor)

\*For a virtual visit to the Lace Study Centre with a sampling of its holdings, go to the website: [www.powerhousemuseum.com](http://www.powerhousemuseum.com). The center is open for research by appointment.

by  
Lindie  
Ward



**LAURAN SUNDIN** *Night and Day* Neckpiece, gold and silver wire, gold beads. Similar to piece being made for *Love Lace!* exhibition.  
*LEFT:* Linen needle lace panel depicting Judith and Holofernes, worked with red silk and human hair, England, mid-1600s, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, Australia. Gift of Christian R. Thornett, 1966, A5335.

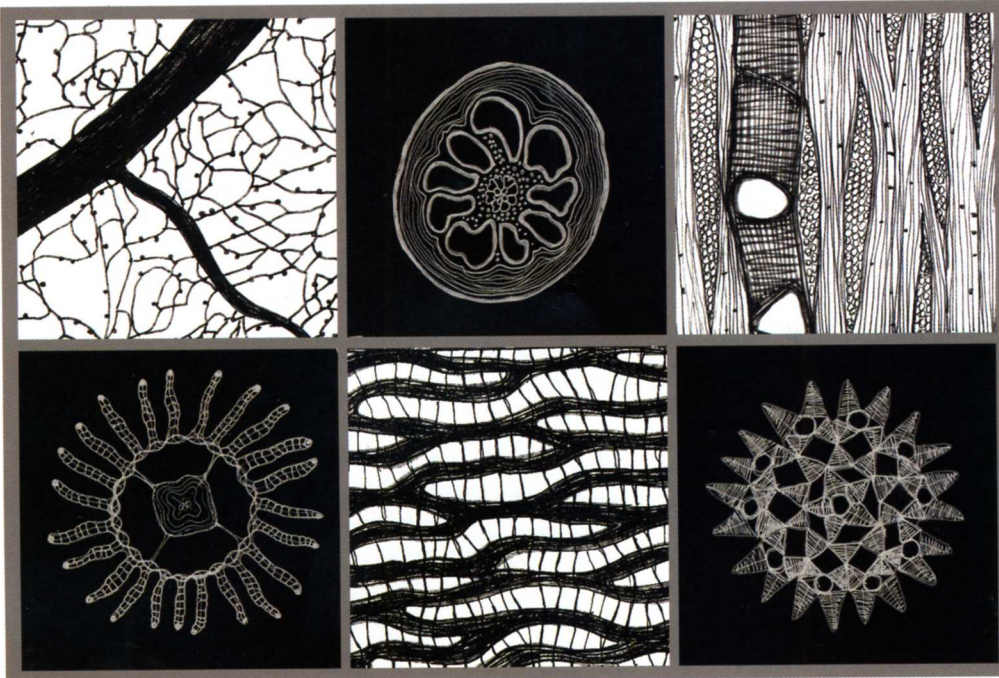
**Love Lace! is the third Powerhouse Museum International Lace Award exhibition.** This forthcoming display of unique works represents a quest to challenge conventional notions of lace. The Museum has an exceptional collection of hand-made lace dating from the 1600s and a dedicated Lace Study Centre where volunteers demonstrate traditional techniques. Through this involvement in lace, the Powerhouse Museum has chosen to open a discussion into what lace can be.

Lace holds both the subtlety of discreet revelation and the mystery of concealment. The play of positive and negative spaces is a key element in artistic composition in many disciplines. With lace there is a critical relationship between the size of the spaces inside the structure and the nature of the materials used to express the design. If the material is thread, the question is how much space the threads can carry. With sheet steel, however, the question is how large can the holes be

without the steel buckling or losing its dramatic design effect?

One hundred-forty finalists were chosen by five international judges. The resulting exhibition, which will be on view from July 29, 2011 through April 29, 2012, will be a breathtaking display of contemporary design that showcases originality and innovation. The dramatically lit exhibition will bring together the work of creative artists from an unusual range of skills in fiber, wood, paper, glass, plastic, metal, and digital multimedia.

The award brief invited designs for “an openwork structure whose pattern of spaces is as important as the solid areas.” This broad scope encouraged a host of different mediums and disciplines in addition to textiles. “Openwork” allows an object to be read in two ways—as positive and negative. Many finalists have maximized this interplay. The award called for work of powerful visual impact, innovative in its use of materials and



**LENKA SUCHANEK** *Are We Made of Lace?* Drawn proposal for six bobbin lace panels, enameled copper wire on acrylic background, each unit 15" x 15", overall size 30" x 45", 2010.

**BELOW: LENKA SUCHANEK** *Are We Made of Lace?* Work in progress.

**RIGHT: ANNIEBELL MARRNGAMARRNGA** *Yawkyawk Spirits* Bamboo frame, twined pandanus, dyed.

techniques, redefining traditional expressions of lace and its design applications, and having a sense of the artist's identity and cultural origins.

Prizes totalling \$40,000 (Australian dollars) will be presented at the exhibition opening, part of the Sydney Design Festival in July. The exhibition catalogue, documenting the work of the award finalists, will be duplicated on the Powerhouse Museum's website

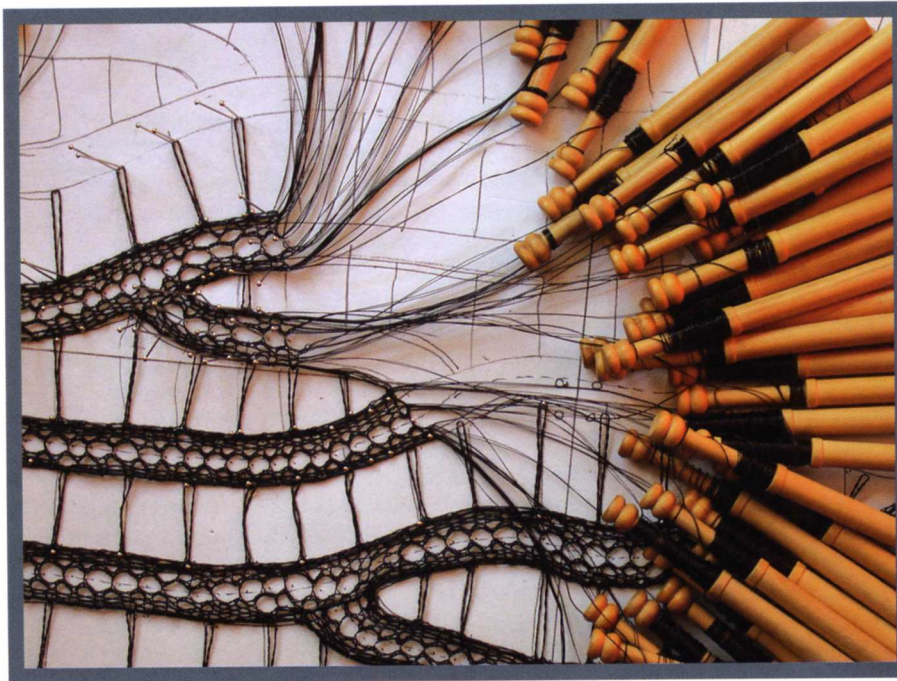
([www.powerhousemuseum.com](http://www.powerhousemuseum.com)).

More than 700 entries to the Lace Award were received from 33 countries. Some of those countries have long traditions of lacemaking; others have not. Works of the finalists range from the most delicate webs of fibers to the boldest spatial installations. This collection of creative works has brought together artists and makers from 22 countries to show off their interpretations of

lace in a host of extraordinary materials. Each work expresses its maker's unique sense of place.

Proposals included work for the built environment, fashion, and digital multimedia as well as in traditional techniques. Materials such as sheet steel, titanium, silver, gold, glass, paper, leather, wood, resin, echidna spines, angora, flax, silk, human hair, horsehair, Teflon, and natural fibers would express the ideas of diverse cultures.

Two- and three-dimensional entries included work in tapa, bobbin lace, laser cutting, oxyacetylene welding, machine sewing, printing, netting, needlelace, glass etching, burning, and



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paper cuts. Lighting designs used paper as well as natural and optical fibers. Jewelry materials included hand-cut titanium, silver, gold, stainless steel, and thread. Fashion entries were constructed with silver links, leather, brass, knitted angora, raffia, wool felt, and horsehair. Digital multimedia works included animations and visitor-sensitive interactive experiences.

Organic themes flourish among the works selected. "Are we made of lace?" asks Vancouver artist Lenka Suchanek. She uses her mastery of the bobbin lace technique to create contemporary artworks and jewelry.

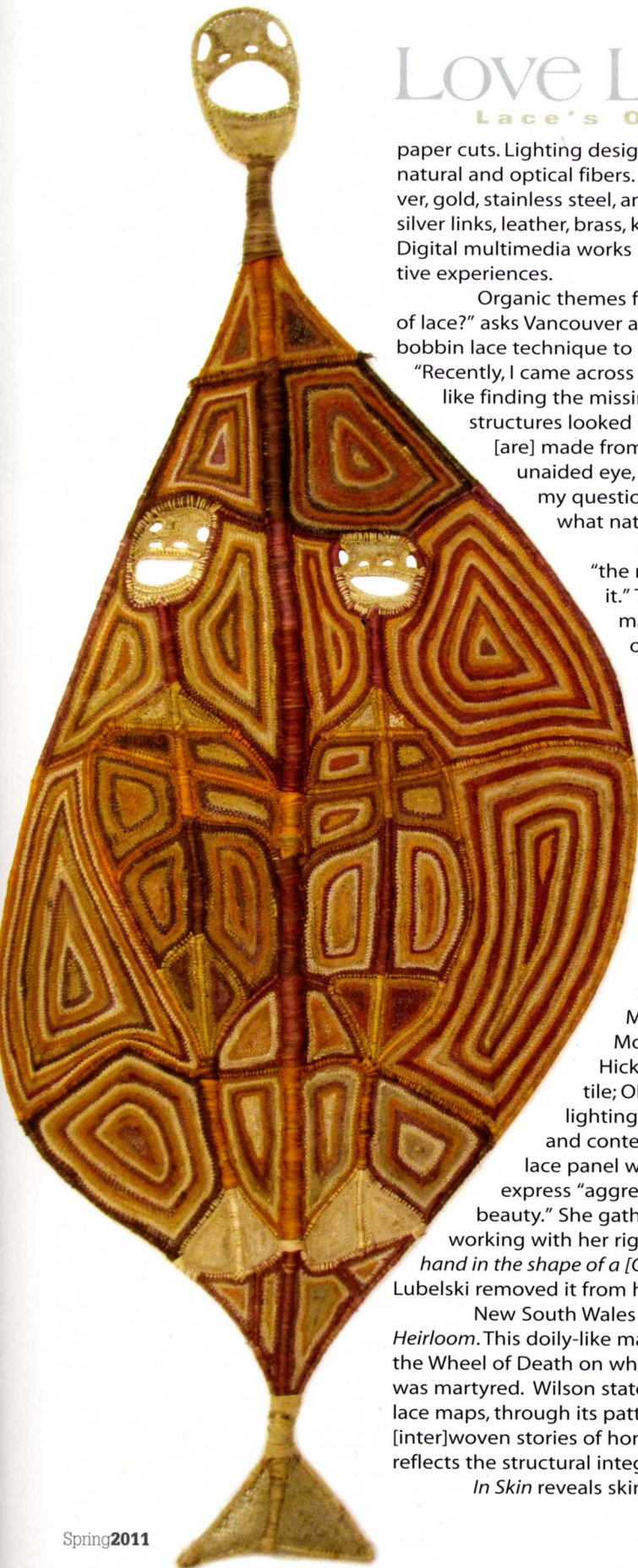
"Recently, I came across scanned electron microscope images... and it felt like finding the missing piece of a puzzle," she said. "The images of cell structures looked exactly like lace. Plants, sea plankton, humans... all [are] made from a primordial lace that cannot be seen with unaided eye, but it pervades everything. I found the answer to my question. And an inspiration for this work that celebrates what nature creates every day."

Anniebell Marrngamarrnga's artwork represents "the mythical Yawkyawk or young woman being spirit." The female water spirit is perhaps the most enigmatic mythological theme for the Kuniñjku people of Western Arnhem Land in Australia. Sometimes compared to the European notion of mermaids, Yawkyawks exist as spiritual beings living in freshwater streams and rock pools, particularly those in the stone country. A Yawkyawk is usually depicted with the tale of a fish, long hair, and the face of a young woman. This figure is made from carefully prepared, dyed, and woven bush grasses in the Maningrida Community in the Northern Territory of Australia.

Ten American finalists' proposals included a spectacular netted installation by Janet Echelman, ethereal lace jewelry by Luran Sundin, a spiderweb screen by Nathan Howe, a Model N Ford engine crocheted in wire by Anne Mondro, and a delicate suspended silk net by Pat Hickman.\* Anneliese Vobis created a biomorphic textile; Olivia Valentine constructed architectural lace. With lighting, Xia Gao produced an environment for memory and contemplation; Pauline Verbeek-Cowert's exquisite lace panel was woven and felted. Nava Lubelski chose to express "aggression, awkwardness, and impatience, as well as beauty." She gathered fragments of thread, lace, and braids and, working with her right hand onto her left, produced *A cast of my left hand in the shape of a [Glove]*; as each "glove" in the series was finished, Lubelski removed it from her hand like a shed skin.

New South Wales artist Shona Wilson used found materials for *Heirloom*. This doily-like mandala draws comparison to the Catherine wheel, the Wheel of Death on which St. Catherine, the patron saint of lacemakers, was martyred. Wilson states: "Traditionally, in western female handiwork, lace maps, through its patterns and motifs, the interconnections and [inter]woven stories of home and religious life. Delicate yet strong, lace reflects the structural integrity of natural forms and the human condition."

*In Skin* reveals skin-soft kid leather intricately laser-cut by English





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BELOW: ANN MONDRO *Detroit's Shadow* Work in progress: full size replica of the Model N Ford engine, approx. 28" x 40" x 24", single stitch crochet.

LEFT: The Model N Ford engine.



artist Joy Buttress. "Lace has a unique structure that has an ambiguity of meaning like no other fabric," she says. "I am interested in exploring the interaction of lace with the body. Leather gloves offer the surface of skin and a symbolism that reflects the ambiguity of meaning that lace has as a fabric. Gloves have historical significance from status and position, to war and love; they protect, conceal and limit touch." Buttress accesses the Nottingham Trent University lace archives to inform her work.

Patsy Payne also plays with the idea of skin in larger than life two-dimensional figures such as *Hold 6* in laser cut sheet steel. "What I am attempting to convey in my works is a sensing or feeling of a lifetime's diverse experiences becoming part of one's body, being inseparable from the visceral being contained by skin, and being agents of change in the body," Payne said. The pieces operate as lace work, connecting the viewer with the rest of the world through a fretwork of metal. The negative spaces are a crucial visual window that brings the back to the front and vice versa."

Four generations of silversmiths precede the work of artist Bethamy Linton who has hand-cut her *Heel to Throat* cuff in titanium. *Euphrasia arguta*, a threatened wildflower depicted in her work, reflects another family continuum: a century-old fascination for threatened West Australian wild-



flowers and concern for the fragility of the natural environment.

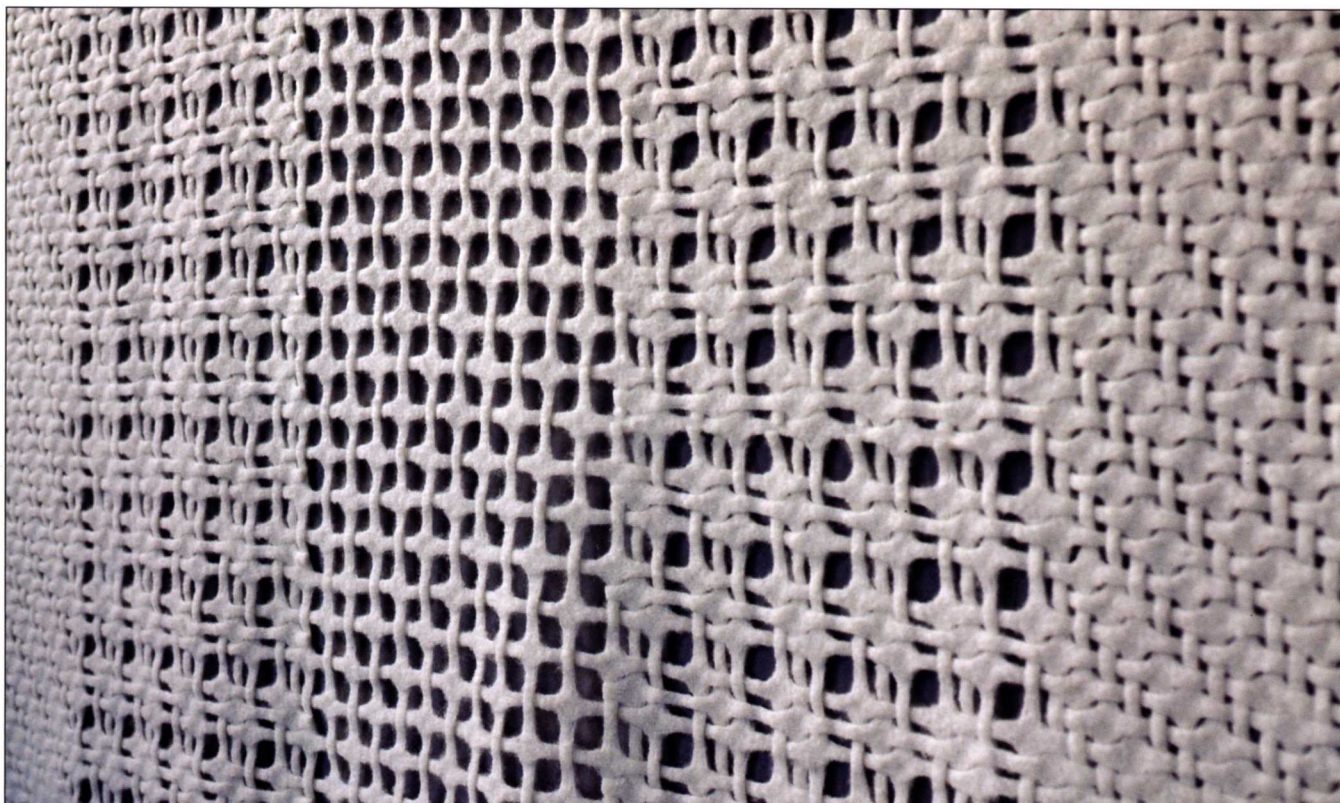
An old truck sat in a paddock in Oberon, New South Wales, until October 2010, when artist Ingrid Morley chose it as a vehicle for her openwork structures. With a fine oxyacetylene torch, Morley welded the truck's bonnet, sides, and roof into intricate lace patterns. "I wanted the design to reflect the lacework of roads, symbolically referring to our human condition against the unique and magical Australian landscape. When I first saw her, I had an enormous affinity with her symbolically. An old girl



**INGRID MORLEY** *Lacie Lorrie* Proposal for openwork pattern cut in truck with oxy-acetylene torch.

**RIGHT: BETHANY LINTON** *Heel to Throat* Cuff, hand-cut titanium.

**BELOW: PAULINE VERBEEK-COWERT** *Felt Lace* Work in progress: Merino wool, dobby woven, hand-felted and cut, 108" x 44".



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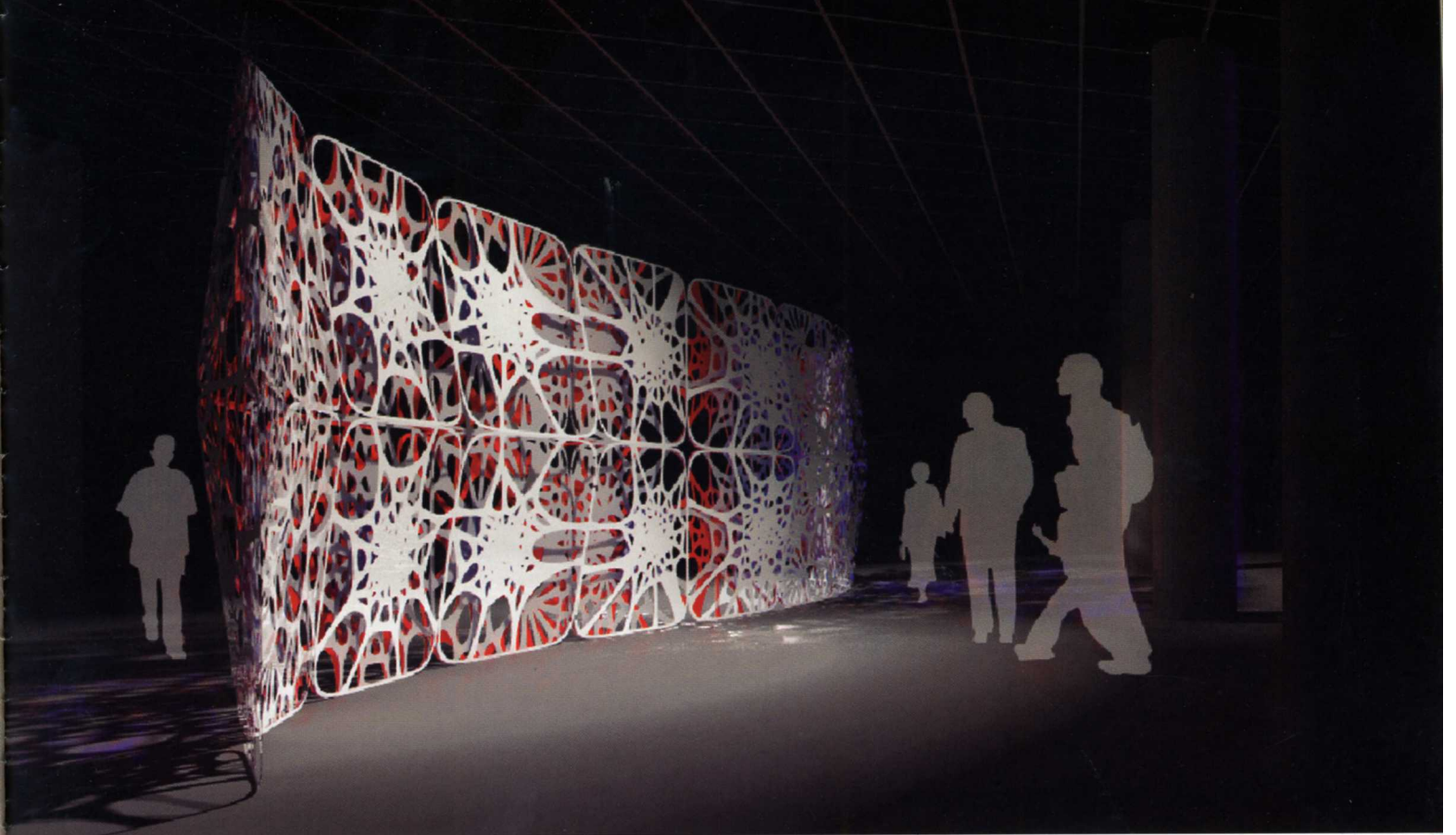
**KIM LIEBERMAN** *Tribe* Handmade silk lace, bronze found objects, about 130cm x 200cm x 70cm, 2010. *RIGHT:* Detail of work in progress.



**BELOW: NAVA LUBELSKI** *A cast of my hand in the shape of a [Glove] v. 1-5* Thread and found trimmings, 2" x 25" x 2.5", 2010.







**NATHAN HOWE *Spider Lace*** Proposal for installation constructed of card stock paper with acrylic struts and connectors tying each panel together to create serpentine structure. Actual piece to be 10m x 2m x 2m.

going rust-red like the Australian soil, time-pocked and work-etched—but still beautiful in her ‘put out to grass’ state: I wanted to dignify her with finery and thereby also acknowledge the Australian working class.’

Five headless bronze figures were decorated with wide red silk bobbin lace collars in a spectacular work by South African artist Kim Lieberman. She states: “I have been working with the concept of human interconnectedness for more than twelve years. I have used different media to explore this diverse, deep, scientific and mystical concept.”

Cecilia Heffer and Bert Bongers teach contrasting disciplines at the University of Technology, Sydney. *Inter-Lace* is designed to create a sensory tactile experience of lace in a three-dimensional virtual environment. Heffer embeds her delicate machine-made lace with electronic sensors, and it becomes the focus of Bert’s multimedia presentation. *Inter-Lace* explores the mysterious spatial interplay between real and virtual worlds. Its layers explore the light and shadow between material and ephemeral conceptions of negative and positive space.

The 2011 Lace Award has created a new vision for a diverse range of creative disciplines. It challenges creative artists to find new ways to experiment with positive and negative spaces. These design applications have much to offer architecture, design, and digital multimedia. The contemporary motifs and techniques will inspire tomorrow’s lacemakers to create new designs and, conversely, artists and designers will be inspired by the exquisite techniques of traditional lacemaking. The exhibition will present a singular collection of contemporary approaches and skills thrown to the task of creating designs for openwork structures—a rare find in one show. When its run at the Powerhouse ends next April, *Love Lace* will travel to other venues.

\*See Pat Hickman’s *Constellation* in *Surface Design Journal*, Winter 2011, Vol. 35. No. 2, p. 6.

—Lindie Ward is curator of *Design and Society*, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, Australia, specializing in Australian and European textiles and lace, and is in charge of the museum’s Lace Study Centre. She has worked on many exhibitions and publications at the