

Rachael Wellisch  
**Polymorphic Magic**  
Textiles Transformed



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*Redland Art Gallery acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands and seas where we live and work. We pay our respects to Elders, past, present and future.*

*Redland Art Gallery is an initiative of Redland City Council, dedicated to the late Eddie Santagiuliana.*



**REDLAND ART  
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# Relics from the Futures' Past

There was a time when blue had no name. Ancient texts brimmed with evocative descriptions of heavens, seas, and sky, though were largely defined as colourless and elusive. Intimately associated with precious pigments, unattainable deities, bottomless depth, and the invisible atmosphere, the colour blue constantly eludes containment. To imagine a time where this all-encompassing and powerful colour remained unnamed is a strange vision. Particularly as we now exist on another page of blue's history, one where it has been identified and selected as an important ingredient in our social elixir.

This previously nameless colour now hums and whirrs in the very fabric of Rachael Wellisch's exhibition, *Polymorphic Magic*, and reminds us that the future always holds the capacity for positive transformation if we so choose it. As we approach ecological tipping points, *Polymorphic Magic* offers us alternate modes of thinking, making and consuming so we can hold optimism for a more sustainable and environmentally viable world.

In every culture waste is associated with negative symbolism. It is the refusal to afford meaning to matter after we deem it no longer of use. When approached with the topic, Wellisch playfully muses that "waste is only waste when it is wasted." Following this sentiment, the artist's alchemical process of turning discarded textiles into artistic objects of contemplation, care, and value, unwraps the potential for all material things to flourish in endless iterations.

Evoking the sentiment of colour being a "polymorphous magical substance," as coined by anthropologist Michael Taussig, Wellisch's use of indigo is at once material, action and perspective. Through the process of cultivating, activating, and dyeing with the indigo plant, the works' blue gradients and thresholds push and pull the audience like an oceanic current.

The exhibition's artworks offer a sumptuous platter of material possibilities. Plush, pulpy pillars and thin sheets of fabric appear like geographical stratification. Its expansive, lush drapery submits and unwinds into gravity. Hand-dyed, cut and layered one piece at a time, the sheer time and attention invested into each artwork challenges the hurried consumers impulse. By employing the natural process of indigo dyeing, Wellisch taps

into rich narratives of technology, ritual, innovation, and human connection throughout the dye's immense history.

It is not only the immense history of indigo that evokes a sense of the utterly monumental within the exhibition. Each chosen form imagines itself as a relic from the future's past: a monument, a tablet, a scroll, or an unearthed schist that uncovers truths about our present moment. The exhibition asks us where the tipping point for cultural change exists. It pleads with us to consider the threshold for what we simply can no longer tolerate when it comes to the nurture and sacrifice needed to ensure the longevity of world around us.

Through traversing nuanced ideas of the past, present and future, *Polymorphic Magic* uncovers that the elusive and uncertain future is more present than we realise. The future is a blue that patiently hides in the salty, colourless sea water cupped in your hands. The future resides in the permeable threads of a second-hand blouse that once was cherished, but can be beloved again. The future is a hopeful flash of the dusty blue ocean on the horizon that you glimpse from your car window. The future is a choice you make now. To live more tenderly, to breathe a little deeper and tread a little softer for our world to exist in the brilliant, shimmering, incredible blue of hope.

**Taylor Hall, May 2022**

Gallery manager, writer, and curator based in Meanjin (Brisbane)



Image left: *Knot Work (detail)* 2022, indigo dyed, organic cotton t-shirt offcuts, on canvas. Courtesy of the artist.

Images this page, left to right: *Monumental Schists #9-11* 2022, indigo dyed, layered, salvaged textiles. Courtesy of the artist.

*Softest Hard #8* 2022, handmade paper, from indigo dyed, salvaged textile waste – cotton jersey t-shirt offcuts. Courtesy of the artist.

Images bottom: *Tomes #18* 2022, handmade paper, from indigo dyed, salvaged textile waste. Courtesy of the artist.





Image left: *Recovered Material Monuments #15-21 (detail)* 2022, indigo dyed, layered, salvaged textiles, six pieces on custom plinths made also from recycled materials. Courtesy of the artist.  
Images this page: *Recovered Material Monuments #7 (detail)* 2019, indigo dyed, layered, salvaged textiles. Courtesy of the artist.