

Ripped Stockings & Gel-X Dreams

A response to Threadbare | Mia Foulds

Written by Sophia Tele

The Bed

Serving as the central motif of Threadbare,
the bed is liminal.

Withholding its typical resonances—
relaxation, slumber, intimacy—
the bed is subject to abjection.

A space where solace and discomfort co-exist.

For where one should feel most at ease,
the bedroom can exist
unmoored and restive for some.

Instead,
the bed is merely
a state of transition.

Sunset to sunrise.

Bodily residues settle,
seep,
and leak into the sheets of everyday life.

An afternoon nap
after coming home from school,
waking up disoriented,
caught between the pull of day and night.

A makeshift desk,
papers and pens spilling over the comforter,
eyes strained,
fingers numb from endless typing.
Midnight deadline hovers,
slumber, a distant, fading thought.

An ad hoc dining table,
when the rigid ceremony
of chair, posture, and expectation
feels impossible to perform.

Awakening in the morning
knowing where the end of the day
will conclude.

The bed.



Threadbare:

- (of cloth, clothing, or soft furnishings) becoming thin and tattered with age.
- (of a person, building, or room) poor or shabby in appearance.
- (of an argument, excuse, idea, etc.) used so often that it is no longer effective.¹

To feel threadbare—worn out and tangled under the weight of dilapidation—leads to a silent and subtle form of abjection. Almost as though forgotten, as if cast off, even just by yourself. To untangle, approach and acknowledge the threads of the lingering ache of these pains, this exhibition explores these unfiltered and often unspoken feelings.

Threadbare draws on Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection, capturing the visceral rejection experienced instinctively when the boundaries between self and other, familiar and alien, clean and dirty, become blurred and begin to dissolve deeper into the bedroom. Kristeva's theory of abjection is a psychoanalytic concept referring to the innate human reaction of horror triggered by threats of violating societal rules and order.² This state of subjectivity triggers an instinctive rejection rooted in the perceived threat it poses to one's sense of self and the stability of social order, exposing the anxiety that surfaces when these boundaries are clouded.³

Mia materialises these tensions and the beauty in dichotomies by incorporating bodily cast-offs to adorn her sculptural practice. Loose hairs sprayed across the pillowcase because you forgot to wear a protective hairstyle to bed. Dead skin cells accumulated on the mattress from bed rotting all week. Nail trimmings scratching at the skin from haphazardly clipping them off, ready for your Gel-X Nail appointment the next morning. These human traces we cast off without another wonder are etched and smudged into Mia's works, compelling the audience to confront what we reject in disgust.

¹ The Oxford Pocket Dictionary of Current English, "threadbare." Encyclopedia. Accessed May 2, 2025, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/threadbare-0>

² Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2024).

³ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*.

Threadbare highlights what is easily discarded, ignored and unbeknownst, which speaks to the emotional, physical and societal margins of the abject. Defined as something no longer wanted, abandoned or discarded—the use of cast-offs in *Threadbare* transcends beyond the physical.⁴ Mia's use of cast-offs from the objects she casts, whilst inherently collecting human traces along the way, evokes the automatic dismissal of things that aren't of inherent value. With the abject debris being used to adorn the space with poetry, the cast-offs are also active participants in a long-term process of change, bringing to light things that are typically hidden or avoided. It poses the significance of being present in a moment of a time, a time that may not seem memorable or worthwhile. Getting out of bed in the morning after a night out, leftover makeup streaked over the white canvas of your bed linen. Sand grit collected in a pool at the bottom of your tote bag from a spontaneous trip to Piha after dinner the night before—now a bother having to clean it out while getting ready. Ripping a hole through your stockings in a rush out the door in the morning. Then proceeding to drip clear nail polish on the bedroom floor in a dire attempt at saving the last threads of the stockings, willing them to hold out until the end of the day. *Threadbare* allows for a quiet meditation on the traces we leave behind: physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Disgust grown in volume is persistent and has become a process of its own within *Threadbare*. Mia's collection box of abject cast-offs—containing metal shavings, sand, plaster remnants, skin cells and the sweat of lived moments—transitions into reliquary and residue. As the body leaves its quiet marks—moisture, cells, the worn-thin (threadbare) ruptures of fabric—the atmosphere thickens with unease. However, rather than repelling the observer, this discomfort pulls us in and forces us to face our own part in the cycles of buildup and shedding. In this accumulation of the discarded cast-offs, we are presented with the lingering presence of the self—threadbare, perhaps, but not forgotten. We are both the ones who leave behind the residue and the ones who are asked to confront it. We become active participants in *Threadbare* and its narratives.

By aestheticising the abject, Mia challenges taboos around female subjectivity and reclaims elements of identity commonly deemed impure or shameful.⁵ *Threadbare* sits on the cusp

⁴ The Oxford Pocket Dictionary of Current English, "castoff." Encyclopedia. Accessed May 2, 2025, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/castoff>

⁵ Marsha Meskimon, *Women making art: History, subjectivity, aesthetics*. (London: Routledge, 2012).

between appeal and revulsion, revealing the fragile structures of identity and societal order whilst provoking contemplation on the beauty within the discomfort of the abject; the power of what is often discarded.

Mia dives further into the abject where her poetry becomes and behaves like the cast-offs it describes—borrowed, presented, and returned. Our every touch, every thread we shed lingers. This cyclical nature emphasises language impermanence and malleability. Evocative of the collection box that gathers traces of lived experiences, Mia's poetry offers a nuanced and subtle form of abjection as it accumulates both audiences' emotional and bodily fragments over the period of her show. The collection box of cast-offs also serves as a silent archive where what is typically deemed overtly gross is embraced, maintained and (re)cycled. Intense, visceral and emotive wording such as "...to consume, to devour, to stuff and to gulp..." suggests emotional and physical saturation, echoing Kristeva's notion of the abject as that which threatens the borders of one's sense of self.⁶ *Threadbare*'s poetry portrays ideas of overflowing, spillage and soaking, implying the breaking down of boundaries both private and public. Evoking such liquid imagery, these ideas presented through poetry express a fundamental anxiety where the societal barriers we rely on to identify with and define ourselves by are not secure. They are instead flexible, fluid and ultimately threadbare.

In a delicate, meditative, intrinsically elegant manner, Mia has approached such intimate and evocative themes throughout her works in *Threadbare*. *Threadbare* invites viewers to engage with and sit in moments of vulnerability and discomfort, provoking contemplation of the societal threads that weave together our sense of identity, consciousness, and sentiment.

⁶ Mia Foulds, "Pores", poem exhibited in *Threadbare* (Auckland: RM Gallery, 2025).

References:

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