

EG
Embroiderers' Guild

embroidery

MAY | JUNE 2005 £4.90

MEET
FASHION
AND
TEXTILES
GURU

ZANDRA
RHODES

ALL THAT
Glitters...

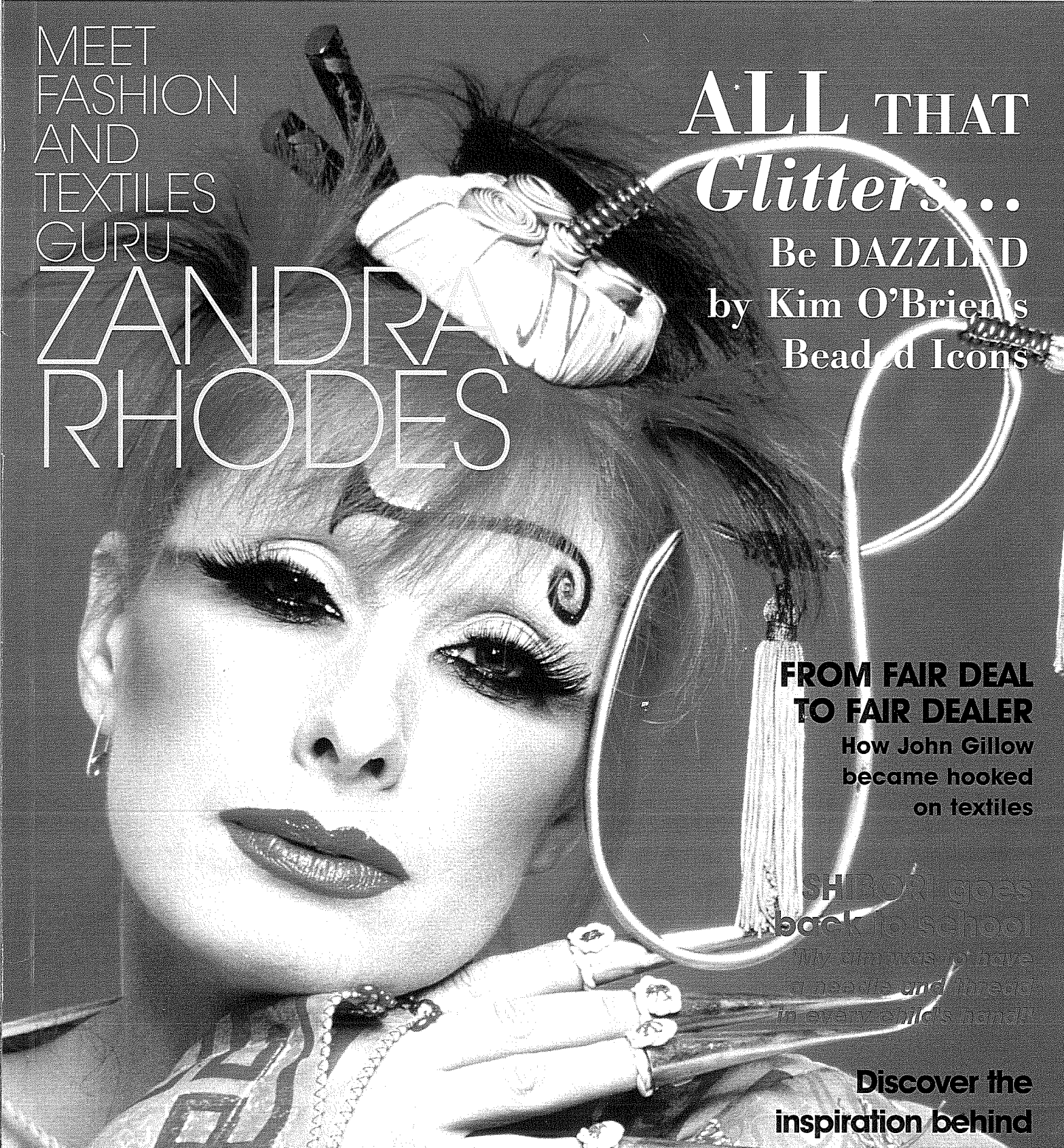
Be DAZZLED
by Kim O'Brien's
Beaded Icons

**FROM FAIR DEAL
TO FAIR DEALER**

How John Gillow
became hooked
on textiles

SHIBORI goes
back to school
My aim was to have
a needle and thread
in every child's hand!

Discover the
inspiration behind
Karina Thompson's



On the SCULPTURE trail

Cristin Searles fashions her work from starched silk organza, bridging the void between sculpture and textiles. She talks to Jessica Hemmings

Despite holding BA and MFA degrees in Sculpture, American artist Cristin Searles admits that it took some time before she realised that her chosen medium as a sculptor could be fabric. After completing her studies Searles lived in New York City and worked in costume design and construction. Fabric became how she earned a living, not how she made her art.

'Working with fabric meant craft and function, not fine art,' she says. 'It took some time for me to realise that fabric was also the ideal material for my sculptural work.'

Today Searles' sculptures are fashioned from starched silk organza. Her choice of material minimises the need for intrusive scaffolds or armatures to shape three-dimensional form.

Like some of Michael Brennand-Wood's work there is evidence of a printed floral repeat whose layers of colour have been peeled apart, opened up and given space to move. But unlike the individual components of Brennand-Wood's recent work, such as stitched flowers that are in their own right already complex pieces of stitch and

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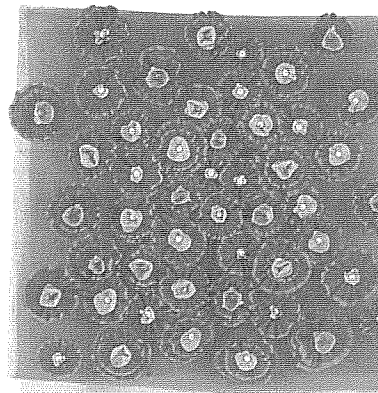
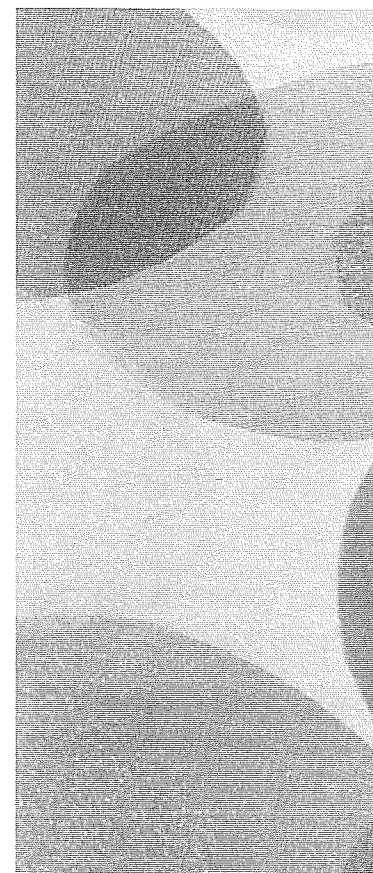
colour, Searles' work has a greater sense of deconstruction. Many pieces comprise several layers of fabric secured only by single stitches. These points are like sutures sewn with the delicate concentration one would expect of a surgeon joining skin.

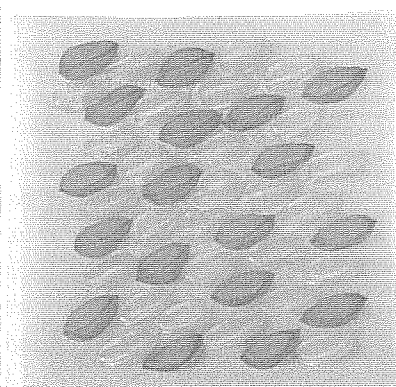
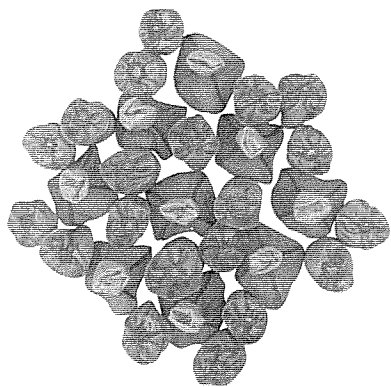
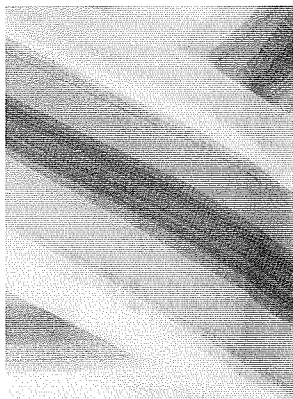
These clusters suggest a cancer at work. But rather than

evoke horror, the mutating repetitions of shape intrigue rather than alarm.

Searles' textiles seem to belong to a subliminal world between air and water, where light defines their physicality. The ephemeral nature of the sheer organza relies heavily on the available light. Low ambient light causes shapes to slip out of focus, while a sharp spotlight casts intricate shadows that make it difficult to discern the individual layers of cloth. In both cases it feels as though a current of water is moving across the surface; muting electric colours through its filter, blurring ever so slightly the edges of once hard forms, and making it impossible to discern if a particular colour is the result of one piece of cloth or the eye blending several layers of distinct hues.

Each grouping is displayed either pinned to the wall or stitched by hand in layers on an organza backing. Unfinished works in the studio reveal traces of the domestic; snatches of references to the garments' structure such as a cuff or collar without sleeve or neck. But it is difficult to keep these clues in mind when the works are assembled and seen as a whole. Once assembled, they refuse to confess any trace of the mundane. In this way they seem, through very contemporary concerns about the conceptual role of art, to support Rozsika Parker's often quoted Foreword to *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the*





Making of the Feminine. Parker suggests that: "The art of embroidery has been the means of educating women into the feminine ideal and of proving that they have attained it, but it has also provided a weapon of resistance to the constraints of femininity." Searles' work teeters on this edge with the inevitable domestic and female associations of the textile joined with its unarming ability to transcend the prescribed associations cloth carries.

Searles attributes much of the sense of air and light that fills her work to the spacious studio she now works from in Providence, Rhode Island. Here she keeps several pieces in varying stages of completion on the go at any one time. Glancing at a work she began before the birth of her second child late last year, she notes with some trepidation the time it will take to realise the intricate layers of material she has decided upon. But she seems thoroughly committed to the process, explaining, "The labour-intensive nature of the work allows plenty of time for me to make decisions and find solutions in a Zen-like way that refuses to be rushed".

Top: *Lure* (detail). 2003. Organza. 110 x 95.5 x 10cm

Above from left: *Red Love*. 2001. Organza, satin, glass beads. 72 x 76 x 10cm

***Aqualine* (detail). 2003. Organza. 109 x 109 x 10cm**

***Pucker*. 2001. Organza, satin. 38 x 41 x 18cm**

***Souffle* (detail). 2004. Organza, pins. 30 x 16 x 7.5cm**

***Pulp*. 2003. Organza. 64 x 12.5cm**

With a husband and two small children she admits that time at her studio is increasingly difficult to squeeze into the day but has decided that it is important her studio remain a space dedicated solely to her work. She explains that her time there is a refuge, a place to sink completely into the contemplative nature of stitching and recharge rather than deplete her energy. This state of mind is evident in each of her pieces. They seem to speak in the hushed tones and ample light of their conception, quietly confident that we will put down what we are doing to listen to their beauty. ☺