## Textile with Birds and Smoke



#### Also by Keri Finlayson

Rooms



# Keri Finlayson



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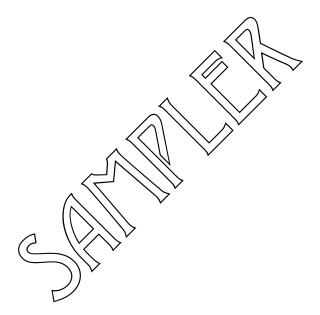




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As a teenager I was very ill. For five years, pain was something I balanced carefully and gently inside me. I read the few books of poetry I had, repeatedly, I sewed constantly. I listened to birds from my bedroom window and I thought about the things that flowed around the island of my bed. I had my final operation at seventeen. At eighteen I left for university to read theology. Though not a theist, isolation and pain had gifted a deep fascination with the contradictions of contemplative life.

The concerns that were born during these years have grown with me over a lifetime.



#### **Prints**

A wire footed wren has been here. It hooked a chain between the seams then followed it. Look at the stitch: light, cuneiform cuts in the snow.



#### Tangled with chirrup and fruit

On a breakneck of rocks Tangled with chirrup and fruit, Froth, flute, fin, and quill

—Dylan Thomas

And in those years

it was always late November - bare

dove grey, then darker: woollen must and briefly surfacing light.

And in those years I pinned the days

with shapes of trees and mostly this one:

Wind smeared, toppling

with the toppling wall; a stagger and a yearn for the long horizon;

spined and hard with berries little more than stones made crimson with a shine,

but mostly made soft with birds that changed the whole blurred thorny smear

to panicked song as I walked past to school

I didn't have the words until I was fully grown.

The stones, the birds, the panicked spines,

I found them in a book which quietly had kept for me

that briefly surfacing shines the long and lit horizon

of the calm and waiting line

#### Hysteroplastic

*Hysteroplasty*: reconstructive surgery used to repair a malformed uterus where layers of stitches are used to create a normal shape.

*Trapunto*: a quilting technique using two layers, the underside of which is slit and padded producing a raised surface.

I have five scars
Three long slices
And a diagonal cut on the right side of my abdomen
with a nick above like the morning star

The pain arrived the second time I bled twisting through a place lower than my rumbling stomach lower than nervous flutterings or queasy hips

through an inside I didn't know I was thirteen

Thirteen, learning the of my family a povert wrapping my gussers with thin sheets

of cloudy loo roll

'This is what it is,' men with stethoscopes said dry screams no tears only new brand new vowels cried below audibility I bought two metres of calico a pad of polyester batting and imagined myself a skirt with a trop waisted panel trapunto quilting – a thickened yoke running from hip to hip.

I drew a double trail interwoven lines centre bowed to such complexity across the yoke it took me days to figure the clustered knot that would dip below.

a difficulty with button holes and insertions
a zip is beyond impossible
how on earth do you stop a gape
when you have no means to measure?

Fourteen; appendectomy fifteen: removal of fallopian tube sixteen: pain seventeen: pain seventeen: pain

Pain makes a new space: a streak of grey prairie under slow prickling tv static sky one day it turned inside out

A new space: a wand rubbed over cold gel the inside out on a screen and o! the faces a room of white coats the weight of gathered fabric pulls teenage hand stitching into little frilled puckers dragging out gaps so you might see my thigh or my holed nylon tights. Sew tighter.

a light kapok ball all strands all threads and air thumb and finger rolls I stuffed the over-under tracks and sewed up the wispy slits.

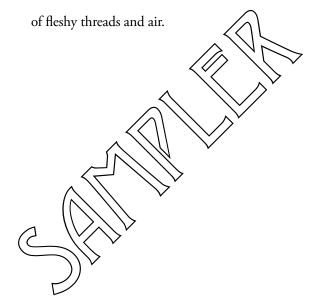
an irregular pentagon of thick quilting from navel to iliam to puhis holds up the whole world as a skirt watch the russed lines run in mad mad looping.

The tailor's slice showed a second, blind blooded womb. A cervix snipped his stitch unfixed the floor turned red

the weight of fabric pulled.

Tacking ripped
the surgeon threw the old bag on the floor
worked a rolled here
embroidered it with woven lines
little looping und-ftilled puckers
of fleshy threads and air.

The stitching in my centre doesn't show but o how long, how long now I've known how the weight of gathered fabric pulls the over-under knot that's always there the interwoven lines



### Assisted Dying Debate

A pro-Atropos argument:

It is both dangerous and rude to snatch scissors.



#### Gulls

We know them don't we

gulls.

Solid bodied, white. The beak a split scream. Yelping us up a storm or a turned tip. Seeding our sky like weeds. They are not souls or prayers but whole cathedrals of rage.

Feathered vaults, gathering all known sound and pitching it as noise

against the false horizon.

