the story of swimwear

exposed!

Australian National Maritime Museum travelling exhibition
This exhibition explores the history of swimwear design within an Australian and global context since the early 1900s. It features the contributions of swimmers, designers and manufacturers in the development of functional and fashionable swimsuits in response to body image, the environment, competition swimming and the emergence of an iconic Australian swimming culture.

The exhibition is arranged in five subthemes:

1. **Images of perfection**: examines the concept of the bathing beauty exemplified in images of screen idols, fashion mannequins and magazines.

2. **Visionary Venus**: examines the role of Annette Kellerman as a role model and champion of functional swimwear for health and fitness.

3. **Evolution of the swimsuit**: the change from bathing to swimming, responses to body image, fashion trends and innovations in textile technology.

4. **A nation of swimmers**: examines the development of a distinctly Australian style in swimwear and beachwear. Popular culture is reflected in graphic images and innovative technologies contribute to the success of Olympic swimmers.

5. **Future vision – Capsule collections and Woollen Mermaids**: presents 2009-10 collections by contemporary Australian designers and the Woollen Mermaids project to reinterpret the classic one-piece swimsuit using black wool and lycra.
Western Australia

**Society and Environment**
Topics: Investigation, Communication and Participation; Place and Space; Culture, Time, Continuity and Change

**Technology Enterprise**
Topics: Technology Process; Materials

**Materials, Design and Technology**
Senior Secondary – Textiles: design fundamentals, design in practice, design techniques, design for the consumer, processes in design and manufacturing, working towards industry standards, innovation in the future.

**The Arts**
Visual Arts: Art Ideas, Skills and Practices, Arts in Society

**English**
Topics: Viewing and Writing

Queensland

**Studies of Society And Environment**
Years 5 – 10 Topics: Time, Continuity and Change; Culture and Identity

**Technology Studies**
Years 5 – 9 Topics: Technology as a Human Endeavour; Elements & Principles of Design; Product Design
Year 10 Topics: Textile Technologies; Technology Materials; Technology Process
Years 11 – 12 Topics: Elements and Principles of Design; Product Design and Sequence

**The Arts – Visual Art**
Years 5 – 10 Making Images and Objects: Art Ideas, Skills and Processes; Arts in Society
Years 11 – 12 Media Areas: Fibre Art, Wearable Art and Body Adornment, Design and Curatorial Design, Graphic Design and Illustration, Product Design

**English**
Years 5 – 10: Reading and Viewing; Writing and Designing
Years 11 – 12: Attitudes and Values; Understanding and responding to contexts

Cloth badge of diving girl 1920s–1940s Embroidered cotton
Reproduced courtesy ANMM Collection
South Australia

**Society and Environment**
Strand: Time, continuity and change: 3.1; 3.2; 4.2; 5.1; 5.2 / Societies and cultures. 3.7; 5.7,
Stage 1 Australian Studies

**Design and Technology**
Strand: Designing: 3.2; 4.2; 5.3 / Making: 3.5; 4.5; 5.5

**Textile Studies**
Stage 1 Contemporary and future issues, Socio-cultural influences, Technological influences

**Arts**
Strand: Arts Practice 3.1; 4.1; 4.2; 5.1 / Arts in Contexts. 4.6; 5.6

**English**
Texts and contexts 3.3; 3.4; 4.3; 4.4; 5.2 5.3
Language 3.7; 4.7; 5.7

New South Wales

**HSIE**
Stage 4 Mandatory Course: Topic 1: Investigating History 4.4; 4.5.
Topic 4: Shaping the Modern World. 4.1; 4.7
Stage 5 Elective Course: Topic 1 Constructing History (Museum Studies) 5.1; 5.5; 5.7
Thematic Studies 5.2; 5.4; 5.5; 5.6; 5.7

**Textiles and Design**
Stage 5. 5.1.1; 5.2.1; 5.3.1
Stage 6 Preliminary Course: Design. P1.1; P1.2; Properties and Performance of Textiles P3.1 Australian Textile, Clothing, Footwear & Allied Industries P6.1
HSC Course: Design H6.1 Properties and Performance of Textiles H3.1; H3.2; H4.1

**Visual Arts**
Stage 4 Mandatory Course: Artmaking 4.2; 4.4; 4.5; 4.6
Critical and Historical Studies: 4.7; 4.10
Stage 5 Elective Course: Artmaking 5.2; 5.4.
Critical and Historical Studies 5.8; 5.9
Stage 6: Artmaking P2; P4; H2; H4 Critical & Historical Studies: P9; H9

**Visual Design**
Stage 5 Making – Representation 5.4. Critical and Historical Interpretation. 5.8; 5.9; 5.10
Stage 6 Wearable Design Module WD1
Clothing and Image DM2; CH2; CH4
Textiles DM2; DM3; CH1; CH2; CH4

**English**
Stage 4 9.7; 9.10; 10.7
Stage 5 3.7; 6.5; 7.1; 7.9

**Primary**

**HSIE**
Stage 3 Identity and Values: Investigating Australian Identities Past and Present CCS3.1

**Creative Arts**
Visual Arts: Artmaking VA3.1; VAS3.2
Appreciating VAS3.4
About THESE RESOURCES

This resource material provides a context for museum studies and is designed as a stimulus for pre- and/or post-visit learning experiences. The information pages provide a related image, content summary and focus questions for each subtheme while the activities are linked to associate curriculum areas, although many of these are inter-changeable. These are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive and teachers may adapt and reproduce material and language to suit a range of learning strategies and outcomes for their students, either in the classroom or during a visit to the exhibition.

The icons below identify the skills base for each activity:

- to discuss
- to write
- to read/research
- to do

Cloth badge with a cut-out girl holding a beach bucket
1920s–1940s Embroidered cotton
Reproduced courtesy ANMM Collection
Images of perfection

The swimsuit is internationally recognised as a symbol of modernity that embodies fashion and function, leisure and athleticism, glamour and sensuality. The iconic image of the bathing beauty has been continually reinvented since its emergence in the early 20th century with the ideal of physical perfection exemplified by screen idols, pin-ups and fashion magazines with emphasis on a curvaceous, ultra-feminine silhouette.

Fashion photography and magazines played a crucial role in transmitting the latest swimwear styles, creating memorable images that could have a life beyond the fleeting fashions they recorded. Gervaise Purcell (1919-1999) created commercial photographs for clients including swimwear manufacturers such as Jantzen and retailers such as David Jones and Hordern Bros. He blended modernity with Australian beach culture, carefree leisure and a touch of luxury.

European cinema in the 1950s promoted the sex appeal of the swimsuit with actors like Brigitte Bardot creating a new look for the bikini. In the movie, *Girl in the Bikini* (USA 1958), she wore a strapless bandeau top with low-cut briefs and represented a natural and youthful sensuality. Hollywood celebrated youth culture in beach party-themed movies such as...
as Gidget, the first of a popular movie genre which featured stars such as Elvis Presley, Annette Funicello and Frankie Avalon to promote a wholesome ideal of American youth.

In the 1960s the 007 and Bond Girl phenomena redefined the power of the swimsuit with Ursula Andress wearing a white bikini with a knife belted to her hip in Dr No (1961). She was athletic, dangerous and predatory which contrasted with the image of previous passive blonde-bombshell and beach genres. In 2006 comedian Sacha Baron Cohen paid a humorous homage to Bardot when he wore a revealing fluorescent green swimsuit dubbed the 'mankini' in his film Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

How has swimwear captured the social and cultural values of a time?

When did swimwear become a fashion statement? Is this still true?

How do photographs communicate ideas and information?
Design a poster to advertise your favourite costume from the 1950s. Find two examples that are still fashionable today.

Look at the Neptune’s Daughter poster and another of your own choice and comment on how they can be viewed as historical resources.

Working in groups, select photographs, posters and swimsuits that show how the idea of the bathing beauty has inspired modern designers. Create a class display of your findings.

Select two swimsuits and create annotated sketches of how fabric, construction and design can create a specific style.

Write a critical review of the Images of Perfection display with reference to structural elements and conventions used to engage the audience through layout, objects, labels and interactives.

Design a print or space-time artwork representing a controversial idea in swimwear design that challenges the audience to re-evaluate their ideas and values.

Find a range of advertising images showing people wearing swimwear/beachwear and create a text about the characters and situations depicted in the scene.

Write a running sheet for a swimwear photographic shoot. Make lists to include photographic equipment, props, locations, costumes and accessories.

Work in groups to consider how visual texts communicate meaning. With reference to texts such as Neptune’s Daughter and Pix magazine, create interpretations using verbal and non-verbal techniques.
Visionary Venus

Sydney-born Annette Kellerman (1886-1975) became a role model for a generation of young women, championing functional swimwear as well as swimming for health and fitness.

Kellerman moved to England in 1905 where she performed amazing swimming feats and attempted to swim the English Channel. Later she embarked on a career as a major aquatic and silent movie star in America, performing daring water stunts in a range of provocative costumes. Dubbed ‘Australia’s mermaid’ and ‘the perfect woman’, she created a new modern look for the swimsuit and for women.

Kellerman’s fame spread in 1907 when she allegedly provoked her own arrest in Boston’s Revere Beach by wearing a one-piece, sleeveless, thigh length, men’s-style bathers. She became a strong advocate for
functional one-piece suits instead of the cumbersome tunic and bloomers fashionable at a time when covering up at the beach was mandatory. In 1908 Annette Kellerman was judged to be the perfect woman and compared to the Venus de Milo sculpture, and the measurements of 10,000 American women! Kellerman lectured on the value of exercise and swimming in sculpting the body to avoid the need for corsets and drapery to define body shape. She devised *A Personal Course of Instruction*, published *Physical Beauty and How To Keep It* and *How To Swim* and also designed her own brand of swimming and exercise wear.

In 1952 American Esther Williams starred as Annette Kellerman in MGM’s musical *Million Dollar Mermaid*, bringing her vivacious life to the big screen. Esther Williams was favoured for the role as she was a competitive swimmer who moved into movies from theatre and aquatic spectacles.

**FOCUS QUESTIONS**

- How does the exhibition examine Annette Kellerman’s contribution to changing attitudes to women in the early 20th century?
- How did social and moral values influence swimwear design in the early 20th century?
- How have artists used themes of bathing to address certain social and cultural issues?
HSIE, SAE, SSAE, SOSE

Imagine you are writing a script for the role of a mermaid in a silent movie. As a class activity, construct a suitable set and costume in the style of the early 1900s. How does this form of entertainment reflect the social and cultural values of the time?

Create a wall chart that explores changing attitudes to public bathing and swimming. Use graphics and/or material to chart the changes in fabrics and design of swimwear.

TECHNOLOGY & DESIGN

Use woollen fabric to make a miniature woman’s bathing costume with tunic and bloomers. Think about the suitability of your garment in terms of function and visual appeal.

Create a role play involving interviews with Annette Kellerman and her contemporaries Beatrice Kerr, Fanny Durack and Mina Wylie, discussing the design features and performance of natural fibres in competitive swimsuits.

VISUAL ARTS

Develop a series of cartoon drawings telling the story of Annette Kellerman as a popular swimmer, film star and entertainer.

With reference to Wendy Sharpe’s pastel interpretation of Annette Kellerman as a conventional self portrait of Wendy Sharpe herself, explain how other artists have explored and re-contextualised a similar theme over time, of artists representing themselves as other famous characters.

VISUAL DESIGN

Using computer graphics, re-contextualise a photographic image of a past famous swimming identity for a contemporary audience.

Evaluate the visual impact of the Visionary Venus subtheme as an account of a specific period that challenged social attitudes towards gender and beauty.

ENGLISH

Research the life of Annette Kellerman and create journal entries on specific events from her point of view.

Aquatic Centres have been named after Annette Kellerman and Fanny Durack. Write and illustrate a Visitor Information Guide outlining the significant achievement of each swimmer.

Write an eyewitness account of Kellerman’s alleged 1907 arrest or write a speech defending her appearance wearing a male swimsuit in a public place.
Exposed! the story of swimwear
AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM TRAVELLING EXHIBITION

Teachers Resources

Evolution of the swimsuit

Early swimming garments were extremely cumbersome but from the 1910s the two-piece neck-to-knee costume left arms and legs exposed while a long skirt over thigh-length pants provided modesty. Materials like machine-knitted wool or cotton were lighter to wear. In 1913 Jantzen created a one-piece woollen tank suit and introduced the terms ‘swimming costume’ and ‘swimsuit’ in advertising. By 1918 women were also wearing swimsuits. In 1921 Jantzen’s ‘How to Swim’ campaign in the USA created the slogan The suit that changed bathing into swimming.

Post World War I, geometric and coloured patterns replaced the old solid black, navy and maroon colour scheme and the popularity of sun bathing saw swimsuits revealing more of the body. Later, men went topless, wearing high-waisted belted wool-knit trunks.
In 1946 two swimsuit designs were launched in Paris, drawing on the symbolism of the atomic tests at Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands. Jacques Heim promoted L'Atome as the world’s smallest swimsuit and Louis Réard followed with Le Bikini, which was made from four small triangles. Rudi Gernreich created the first topless swimsuit in 1964, which was a social statement about freedom.

The revealing styles of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s paved the way for the luxury ranges of the 1990s and today. Progress in textile technology has resulted in costumes that address both function and fashion and reflect the historical move from bathing to swimming.

**Accessories**

Bathing caps added style to swimwear. In the 19th century caps simply kept hair dry. In the 1920s caps were made of latex rubber. Aviator-style caps with chin straps appeared in the 1930s. Caps with moulded decoration featured in the 1950s and flamboyant petal caps followed in the 1960s. Sunglasses were popularised by screen idols.

**FOCUS QUESTIONS**

What social and commercial factors have influenced swimwear design?

How has technology influenced the development of swimwear design?

How would you define innovative design?
Evolution of the swimsuit

HSIE, SOSE, SAE, SSAE

Create templates for male and female mannequins. Choose three major historical changes in swimwear styles and create a changeable wardrobe of costumes using a broad range of materials. Paint or collage a suitable backdrop to display the mannequins and write labels for your exhibition.

Produce a catalogue to explain how swimwear has changed over time and why this occurred.

Select a decade in the 20th century in which swimwear underwent significant design changes. Examine the influences that brought about these changes.

Explain why in 1946 Louis Réard named his exciting new costume after Bikini Atoll in the Pacific Ocean.

VISUAL ARTS

Look at the image of the mural on the previous page. It is one section of the Bondi Surf Bathers’ Life Saving Club mural by D H Souter. As a group re-create this section of the mural in a contemporary context. Create 2D and 3D figures using photomontage, collage materials and paint. Add accessories such as beach umbrellas, toys, boats, chairs using a variety of materials.

How do murals communicate an experience of place and identity? Explain how codes and symbols in Souter’s mural convey a panorama of Australian beach culture at a specific time in history.

Design a series of postcards to show changing attitudes towards male and female body image.

Using annotated sketches develop a body of work on the evolution of swimwear.

VISUAL DESIGN

Create a retro design for a bathing cap and sunglasses as a contemporary interpretation of the 1930s or 1950s.

ENGLISH

As a class activity, look at the Bondi beach scene mural and select a character for a role play. Each character speaks about their day at the beach, in particular clothing and beach games.

Choose an accessory and develop a sales advertisement for it.

TEXTILES & DESIGN

As a class project, prepare a report which examines the importance of natural and synthetic fibres in the evolution of swimwear styles.

Examine the photographs by Gervaise Purcell and write a factual description of the garments including design, style, decorative features and functionality.
A nation of swimmers

The popularity of aquatic pastimes developed as a response to Australia’s climate and geography. The sea baths and river pools of the late 19th century and the establishment of the surf lifesaving movement in the 1900s encouraged water sports as a leisure activity. Learn-to-swim programs and new Olympic standard pools in the 1930s encouraged our champions to compete internationally. Across the country Australians developed imaginative names for swimsuits such as cossies, togs, bathers and swimmers.

Beach culture became an enduring symbol of Australian identity that has been exploited for tourism, immigration and advertising. The growth of swimming and surfing created a demand for swimwear, providing a market for local manufacturers. In 1928 the MacRae Knitting Mills in Sydney created the Speedo brand to launch a new Racer-back style which became a design classic. Swimwear today caters for surfing, sun protection or cultural needs as in the Burquini.

Initially Australians wore homemade bathing costumes based on overseas pattern books or ready-made swimwear from mail order catalogues. By the early 1910s swimwear was mass-produced by local knitting mills. Australia’s relaxed attitude to fashion enabled swimwear and beachwear to become a focus of the Australian fashion industry and innovative brands gained international recognition. Australian designers blended high-end fashion and performance with a demanding leisure market.
Speedo has developed performance swimwear for Australian Olympic swimming teams since 1936. Performance suits come in a range of styles from full body suits to knee suits, long trunks, briefs, and classic one-piece suits and improvements in construction and fabrics have helped reduce drag in the water. Commercial ranges promoted by high-profile swimmers have also been released.

**FOCUS QUESTIONS**

- How has Australia’s climate and geography aided the growth of our swimming culture?
- What factors contributed to Australia’s reputation as ‘a nation of swimmers’?
- How have designers and manufacturers kept pace with demand for swimwear?

Machine shop at Lincoln Spinning Mills Melbourne 1920s
Reproduced courtesy Coburg Historical Society
A nation of swimmers

HSIE SOSA, SAE, SSAE

Create a game where classmates correctly sequence enduring images of Australian beach and swimming culture.

Make a class list of significant Australian identities in Olympic swimming history. Select one swimmer and develop a list of questions for an oral history interview.

Explain the term ‘bronzed Aussie’. Why and how has this image become a symbol of Australian identity?

Research news reports about issues with the design and manufacture of competition swimwear both now and in the past.

TEXTILES & DESIGN

As a group activity, select a range of swimwear representative of a ‘Nation of Swimmers’. Examine how design features, materials and construction techniques contribute to an iconic style.

Make annotated sketches of leisure wear designs. Make note of fabrics, colors, trims, prints and motifs.

Evaluate the significant contribution of companies such as Speedo and Jantzen to the development of innovative competitive swimwear in Australia.

VISUAL ARTS

Sketch a design of a swimsuit that interprets Australian themes such as the bush, national symbols and colours.

Select a range of exhibition images in which artists and designers have responded to beach and swimming culture to create an iconic image of the ‘bronzed Aussie’ as a stereotypical image. In class, discuss this interpretation by the artist and audience.

VISUAL DESIGN

Collect images of swimwear and accessories that feature innovative design and use of non-traditional materials. Consider how these may appeal to a contemporary audience or consumer.

ENGLISH

Compare the use of sun tan oil in the past with modern views. Write an argument for and against sun tanning and/or the importance of a child’s neck-to-knee swimsuit as a suitable form of sun protection.

Compose a magazine article about the achievements of an Olympic swimmer of your choice. Ensure your article uses language and content appropriate for your audience.
From Annette Kellerman to Zimmermann, pioneering Australian designers have contributed to the evolution of the modern swimsuit.

The contemporary design work of aussieBum, Anna & Boy, Collette Dinnigan, Flamingo Sands, Hotel Bondi Swim, Jets, Seafolly, Tigerlily, Watersun and Zimmermann is featured in Capsule Collections 2009/10. The Capsule Collections reflect diverse designs, aesthetics and markets.

The Woollen Mermaid Project is designed to reinterpret the classic one-piece swimsuit. Embodying a contemporary aesthetic and an active glamour inspired by the original mermaid Annette Kellerman, the designers have created imaginative responses in black wool/lycra, referencing both swimwear design at the beginning of the 20th century and the importance of wool in its history. In the 21st century, established and new generation designers are inspired by nostalgic associations with a uniquely Australian beach and pool lifestyle.
Contemporary Australian

SWIMWEAR LABELS IN THE WOOLLEN MERMAIDS PROJECT:

**Jets** by Jessica Allen is known for tailored designs which embrace and emphasise a woman’s curves and are made from a range of glamorous shapes and sensual fabrics. The Woollen Mermaid Screen Sirena White Label features a central panel and decorative armbands.

**Seafolly** is inspired by a fusion of Australia’s love of the beach with international fashion trends. They embrace the Australian mermaid, taking inspiration from the deep, its coral treasures and seagrass to create a texture reminiscent of the scales of the mythical mermaid. The swimsuit reflects a confident, athletic, modern day woman.

**Tigerlily** is a brand associated with glamour. Their Woollen Mermaid design shows a strong sense of femininity and feeling of movement, inspired by Kellerman’s achievements. By creating surface texture we get the sense of a 1920s shawl or dress contrasted with the modern cut-outs and Swarovski crystal zipper.

**Zimmermann** produces swimwear, women’s wear and accessories known for their casual and confident style. Their Capsule Collection features intense hues, mineral shades and metallics with detail in frills, layers and slashed knots. Their Woollen Mermaid design reflects a sculptural form that is wearable and modern.

**FOCUS QUESTIONS**

How do designers re-invent past styles for contemporary markets?

What factors make swimming costumes appealing to potential buyers?

How important is knowledge of the properties of fabrics in the design process?
Future visions

HSIE, SOSE, SAE, SSAE

Imagine the reaction of Annette Kellerman to the Woollen Mermaid Project. Devise interview questions and the types of responses you think she would give.

Write an essay that examines how changes in swimwear styles at a certain time in history can be affected by our beliefs, values and understanding of people and events.

TECHNOLOGY & DESIGN

A design brief was set for second-year fashion students at Queensland University of Technology. The students were required to record the design process as an on-line blog. It can be viewed at http://thestoryofswimwear.wordpress.com

View the Queensland University of Technology blog and investigate the design, pattern-making and production processes undertaken by students. Prepare your own response to the design brief and set up a blog to record your processes.

Explain the importance of wool in the history of swimsuit design.

Prepare a report on the development of the AussieBum swimwear company.

VISUAL ARTS

List swimsuits that reflect a vibrant use of colour and pattern to reference beach lifestyle. Create monoprints or lino prints which are inspired by swimwear designs.

Draw your interpretation of a mermaid costume. Develop this idea into an artwork using a variety of media to emphasise the colours and textures of the sea. Create a class exhibition of mermaids.

VISUAL DESIGN

As you move through the exhibition, make note of the structural elements and conventions used to engage the audience. Consider how the needs of a travelling exhibition have influenced the scope of themes and material components. To what extent is the exhibition easily adapted to fit different exhibition spaces?

ENGLISH

Write a media release for the Woollen Mermaids Project based on the reinterpretation of early swimsuit styles.

Develop a text for a design brief for a retro swimming costume inspired by the 1950s. Before you start, discuss as a class what elements you will need to consider.

Select two contemporary swimsuits which appeal to you as a fashion garment. In an oral presentation give detailed descriptions of the costumes and reasons for your choice.