

## ‘Feeling Business-like’ Fiona Jane Candy



**The suit** is the traditional form of male formal attire in the Western world. Its uniform, standardised configurations such as ‘pinstripe suit’ or ‘suit and tie’, carry numerous connotations. In business settings it can communicate professionalism, respectability and taste. In other milieus, the connotation of corporate life that the suit represents conveys unadventurous conformism. Extreme variations on the suit can also convey the opposite: for example, men wanting to be perceived as edgy or extrovert, wear exaggerated versions of suits with strong colours, patterns, etc. Management staff within corporations are sometimes referred to pejoratively as "suits" (normally by those who consider themselves to be more creative or anti-establishment) to express a contempt for the perceived absence of autonomy in a uniform, elitist bureaucracy. It may also be a comment on the perceived amorality of those who work for corporations.

Today, the business suit offers its wearers- both men and women - a means of expressing individuality and heterogeneity. As an identity form it can span local and global differences. Its materiality embodies both the explicit ideology and the implicit *feelings* of professionalism and of making business.

For the *Mattrealities* workshop project I decided to present the commonplace, familiarity of the materials of the business suit in an unexpected format. By doing this I hoped to create an interactive artwork that could provide multi-sensory physical stimuli (visual, tactile, spatial) with the potential to liberate the range of individual and interconnected experiences and meanings associated with suit wearing and contemporary professional culture.

The finished installation is intended to be part desktop, part board game, where a mysterious casino style puzzle can be enacted. The audience is invited to feel, manipulate and organise the fabric pieces into different configurations. There are some implied rules - but also opportunities for creativity. The pieces, held in place by magnetism on the grid of the gaming board, can be perceived as sensual representations of the tenacious agency of individuals, operatives, professions, or departments within a notional business structure. Experienced in the format of the 'frame', tie silks are revealed as dynamic patterns, miniature allegorical pictures - emblems of interaction and effectiveness; shirtings give off the crisp cotton feeling of cleanliness and precision. In the shifted context of the artwork the symbols and textual forms of information appear simultaneously familiar and mysterious...are they cheeky everyday icons, or are they tarot or runes with potential magical power? The sombre tones and textures of the suiting cloths seem to constitute a powerful yet faceless group of professionals, with the dark, conspiratorial qualities of a secret society.

A hidden drawer holds the key....Welcome to the organisation.

#### **About the artist:**

*Fiona Candy's work focuses on the ways that people make and use things to express identity, define communities and craft social life. She is particularly interested in the ways that people express and interpret personal emotion and sociality through the wearing of differing clothing style. In previous projects Candy has used qualitative interview, video, photography, illustration and motion capture techniques to interpret clothing's impact on personal appearance, but also on the ways that the body may be lived and experienced. She aims to better understand the role that clothing plays in stimulating and animating the body - its influence on the way we feel alive. As well as developing empirical approaches, she makes objects and installations as a means to engage wider audiences in issues of identity and social connection.*

url: <http://www.a-brand.co.uk>

e: [fjicandy@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:fjicandy@uclan.ac.uk)

t: 00 44 (0)1772 893368

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