

UTS Gallery



تفيري قنظ

UTS Artist in Residence 2022 - 2023

UTS ACKNOWLEDGES THE GADIGAL PEOPLE OF THE EORA NATION, THE BOOROBERONGAL PEOPLE OF THE DHARUG NATION, THE BIDIAGAL PEOPLE AND THE GAMAYGAL PEOPLE UPON WHOSE ANCESTRAL LANDS OUR UNIVERSITY STANDS. WE PAY OUR RESPECTS TO THE ELDERS BOTH PAST AND PRESENT, ACKNOWLEDGING THEM AS THE TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS OF KNOWLEDGE FOR THESE LANDS.

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INTRODUCTION

Since 1988, UTS has supported contemporary artistic practices through the activities of the UTS Gallery & Art Collection. The UTS Artist in Residence program [UTS AiR] was initiated in 2021 to extend the university's commitment to Australian artists and support the development and presentation of experimental new work.

The residency program seeks to acknowledge the community of practices, knowledge and pedagogies that shape UTS, and provide a supportive framework for knowledge sharing and cross-disciplinary collaboration of mutual benefit to NSW-based artists and university research. Above all else, UTS AiR recognises that artists need space, time, and financial and critical support to conceive and develop their best work.

The 2022 UTS Artist in Residence program supported HOSSEI in developing a series of costumes activated and extended through live performance and installation over 12 months (2022-23). HOSSEI's residency marked his return to artmaking after a necessary period of caregiving and teaching, and he embraced the potential of this extended period of research, experimentation, and play.

HOSSEI partnered with Associate Professor Timo Rissanen in the School of Design to explore new materials and production techniques. Perhaps most importantly, they considered the potential of the relationship between fashion (the way we see and present ourselves) and care (the way we sustain ourselves and our communities). The influence of this research is evident in HOSSEI's new body of work that draws upon his Persian heritage and his community of practice to explore the extraordinary potential of everyday things to act as vessels for joy and healing.

To date, the UTS AiR program has tested the boundaries of cross-disciplinary enquiry and collaboration - with each artist and researcher bringing their distinct language, technologies, and practices to the process. The program demonstrates the value of embedding contemporary art within a research institution: to enable artists to make work they wouldn't otherwise be able to create and to diversify and enrich tertiary research practices.

I want to express my profound thanks to the Faculty of Engineering and IT, whose generous funding made the 2022 Artist in Residence program possible. My thanks also to the Faculty of Design, Architecture & Building for partnering with HOSSEI on this program of enquiry and experimentation and, essentially, providing a studio space for him to work in. My gratitude and thanks most of all to HOSSEI, Timo Rissanen and their teams for their time, courage and risk-taking during this generative residency program.

Stella Rosa McDonald
Curator, UTS Gallery & Art Collection

HEALING THROUGH JOY

Timo Rissanen

HOSSEI entered the UTS Artist in Residence with a bold ambition: to work on costumes that heal. The timing was fortuitous as I'd been writing about hand-stitching as a healing practice: fruitful overlaps in our practices seemed likely. Throughout the year I have reflected on the question, what might it mean for costumes to heal? And what can fashion learn from that? Here I aim to share some of what I have learned through rich discussions with HOSSEI. Some guidance for reading: this learning ought not to be a cynical exercise that can merely be instrumentalised for profit in fashion, or turned into the next marketable buzzword. Rather, I see an opportunity for us in fashion to see ourselves differently, as a mindful, kind, joyous and imaginative community.

The magic of HOSSEI's work occurs at the intersection of material, the performer's moving body and the viewer's gaze. This has a direct parallel to fashion, if somewhat reduced in today's flattened, designed-for-Instagram fashion landscape. When fashion is primarily designed to exist and to be consumed as an image, our experiential knowledge and collective understanding of its materiality erodes. Our understanding of the body in the space both within and outside of a garment's materiality diminishes. Let HOSSEI disrupt that: the costumes and performances are a timely reminder of fashion's potential for vitality. The energy flowing between performers in HOSSEI's costumes and to the audience and back to the performers is vitalising and healing. With care and intention fashion, too, can generate such healing energy.

In my two decades of working in fashion sustainability research, some aspects of our industry have improved significantly while others have worsened more. In 2004 there were no books on fashion and sustainability; now there are plenty. Our knowledge of the issues and solutions is greater than ever before, and that is wonderful. The impacts of fashion, however, in that time have become worse; clothing production has more than doubled since 2000. Despite extensive evidence that reducing volumes of clothing production is urgently needed, the industry projections through to 2030 predict sustained growth, with corresponding worsening impacts. In Australia we are purchasing 56 garments per person each year: way beyond anything than any of us need. Fashion is on a trajectory of accelerating exploitation and extraction. How might we heal whatever void we try to fill with such a surfeit of clothing?

All of the technical solutions to address fashion's sustainability issues more or less exist, yet things continue to get worse. What might make the difference? I am of the opinion that the key missing factor is a transformation in who we understand ourselves to be. One might call it a spiritual transformation, or an ontological one, perhaps both. This is where HOSSEI's work can function as a vital wayfinder forward in fashion. It is impossible for me to experience HOSSEI's performances without feeling deep joy, expressed as laughing out loud. HOSSEI's costumes bring an immediate smile to most people encountering them, no matter one's internal state. That in itself is healing. HOSSEI's work reminds us that even in the world of commerce that most fashion exists in, joy can be pursued alongside other goals. Joy is an access to healing, and HOSSEI's costumes and performances bring abundant joy.

Fashion scholar and activist Otto Von Busch (2021, p. 15) asserts: "A vitalist perspective in fashion starts the sustainability journey by affirming how fashion contributes to a sense of aliveness. Sustainable practice is not merely to keep living but to enhance life and desire." If one struggles to see how fashion might do that, I propose taking in a HOSSEI performance, guaranteed to enhance life and desire. Von Busch (2021, p. 27) promotes a shift "from fashionable goods to how the vitality of fashion cultivates *fashion-abilities*, that is, capabilities to engage, embrace and modulate the aliveness of fashion". HOSSEI's costumes embody these fashion-abilities in multiple ways, by the artist responding creatively to myriad materials and their idiosyncratic properties, by the performers interacting with the costumes to channel emotions, and by the audience making sense of and emotionally connecting with the exuberance - and aliveness - of HOSSEI's performances.

Why are exchanges like this, between an artist focusing on costumes that heal and a design academic working on systems change, critical? A few years ago I wrote: "Human imagination is one of our most powerful assets in surviving the next five centuries." (Rissanen 2017, p. 534) Imagination, however, is like a muscle: to ensure its optimal performance, it requires exercise. Even in a relatively creative academic field such as fashion design, the constraints on research and practice are formidable when governed by the dominant logics of neoliberal economics. The goals of research and practice narrow, and possibilities wither. Imagination withers. While art is

not immune from those same logics, it often holds onto imagination more robustly. I come out of the exchange with my imagination loosened up and exercised, and my creativity nourished. My thanks to the team at UTS Gallery & Art Collection, the university and HOSSEI for the opportunity.

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ITCHING AND SCRATCHING

Claire Finneran

HOSSEI is my best friend and interviewing your best friend is a pretty funny experience. There's a peculiar swampy shame that sits on top of trying to formalise a conversation between two deeply informal people. How do we pull back on the vulnerability? How do we talk business when our shared love language is emotionally-analytical gossip?

The recording of our interview sounded mostly like this:

“HAHAHAHAHAHA” but we also rambled through care and friendship, transferring and receiving energy from objects, frigidity and bareness and medieval torture vs. sensory toys. Above all else, we talked about what it means to care.

Who cares? He does - his work throbs with it. It's forceful in its generosity. He wants you to know that he cares and he wants you to feel good right now.

—

Claire: You, as a person, can't help but exude warmth and safety to everyone - friends, complete strangers. You're so giving and the works in 'O' seem to be very centred on this giving.

HOSSEI: Yes. And I think maybe I've always been doing this but I didn't know it? I guess until I started officially being my mother's carer and having that title. I think that's what opened this all up and made me start thinking about it.

C: Being “caring” is so complex. Attempting to heal others and particularly yourself is even more complex. People who don't have Cancer in their birth chart (we both do, lol) see these kinds of exchanges as transactional: they give to get. What's your relationship to giving and receiving?

H: Yeah, I don't think I like to receive as much. I'm definitely a giver. But, you know, I think after all that caring, something that I've been working on a lot more is putting that energy on myself and healing myself as well. You can easily neglect yourself.

C: Yeah! Like we've talked about 'Bubble Fever' [his recent performance work for Parramatta Lanes]. You are really asserting an uplifting experience in your work. Urgently caring for the audience...

H: Yeah. It's aggressive.

C: I don't think it's aggressive! But there's like desperation for people to feel better that I relate to.

H: Yeah, I don't know if you would say that six Teletubbies on acid with balloon heads is a gentle way of giving! I am aware that this care is very bombastic and in your face ... It's not just care for people, it's also care for objects.

C: Yes! You've mentioned to me that you transfer energy when you're making your work. How do you do that?

H: I've really thought a lot more about sewing. About the hand that goes into making and who is behind that. I want to acknowledge those people and also acknowledge myself. When I'm making, I add a sort of talismanic energy and give the objects blessings. For example, we've made 'air bags' that I've sung and breathed into. That's my air. I've also got Tanja, who's assisting me, to also sing and put their air in it. And then it's sealed and our air is in there forever. And there's something so magical about that for me.

C: You're putting yourself literally into your work. And you can buy some of that?

H: Yes, I'm launching the ho55ei BLESSSENSE line so there is a chance to buy the air bags. And other bags that have been cared for... that are alive. The care that I put into these objects will hopefully give you positive energy when you take it home. Having it nearby is going to feel good. Tanja and I have given these bags healing properties because we have touched and whispered into them.

C: Yeah, it just has feeling.

H: It has a feeling, and that's what I'm really putting into it. I like making characters out of things. When I was a kid I would get a big pot of water and apply detergent in it. And I would watch all the swirls and the iridescence mixing and swirling. And I remember talking to it and whispering to it and trying to connect with this thing. There's this picture of me when I was little too, surrounded by troll dolls because I was surrounding myself with positive energy and I'm still doing this with my performances and costumes.



Photo courtesy the artist.

C: Cute. I really relate to your personifying of things and feeling like they have feelings. The air bags are challenging for me though because hot breath is my worst nightmare. I'm fascinated, I want to push past my "ew" instinct.

H: It's really interesting that when I was singing into those bags, they became instruments. And holding them and caring for them was a really beautiful experience. Recently I learned about Afro-Iranians and one specific ritual of theirs. When someone becomes ill they receive 'breath-giving' from healers and this would act as an antidote. I think that was one of the starting points to this whole show. It really made me think about air as a healing material.

C: Oh wow, that's incredible.

H: I've also made these things called 'love knots' that are like these seatbelts that go around your chest. The design of the knot is called a cobra knot and people have been doing it for centuries. And, you know my parents used to own Persian carpet and rug stores and I was working there for many years. So I learned a lot about the knots in carpets and the weaving. Care is woven into every knot because they take like an hour each, I make mistakes and lumps and the colours change depending on how I'm feeling. It's about connection with the chain form and how it goes over your heart.

C: Yes, that leads me into thinking about the restriction and release we've been talking about. There's the physical pressures in wearing the love knots, and for the performers wearing your costumes too. You've also incorporated a bit of bareness which is its own kind of release...

H: All my previous costumes were very cloaked, you'd be lucky to see an elbow. And I think maybe this is me sort of embracing parts of my own body more. And thinking about these costumes as being like a home. Another layer of flesh. It seemed right to reveal the true form underneath too. I think with the holes, the bareness becomes a bit abstracted like when you look through a window.

C: You design costumes with so much consideration for the wearer, which is another indicator of your care.

H: I imagine a giant O capturing time travelers like Pokémon Go. There's a giant portal in the gallery that they're shooting out of and it becomes like a fashion show. I didn't want these individuals to come from a certain period or time, but they have picked up similar things that are important to them along the way, like the air bags. And they're walking with shoes on top of bare feet instead of underneath on the carpet.

C: Yeah, how do you feel about shoes versus bare feet?

H: When I was a kid, I really hated socks. I just always wanted to free my feet from being so clamped in. I think there is this punk side of me that is like, yeah, release the foot! All the shoes in this show replicate a foot shape, but they're fake feet, they're not a shoe, your actual foot underneath hits the floor. So it's almost like an emphasis of embracing those foot senses and the carpet textures.

C: Yes there's so much here surrounding the sensory. You love steam, smoke, smells and textures. How has this informed your work? Is O a giant sensory toy? Is it also a sensory irritant?

H: Yeah! Like all the bold colours. Like the hyper pink someone said it felt like being in the womb. And though that wasn't my intention there's something nice about that because I want you to feel safe. I think there's a lot of truth and pure spirit in these hyper colours. Pink makes me feel a bit emotional because I have been using it heaps and I realised that my mum wears this very specific fuchsia a lot. But apart from that it moves you, it makes you feel something. When I just look at that pink there are so many things that happen

to me. And sometimes it's not things that I can fully explain to you. But they're all good things. It's more sensuality rather than sexuality.

C: Yeah like the troll dolls, you can't really articulate what a positive energy is. It just is.

H: There's also lots of significance in the colour silver too. It's linked back to how much I love the medieval era.

C: Torture devices? Or sensory devices because the "torture" would have been kinda good feeling for some people.

H: Like sensory toys for adults. I love when I get a pebble in my shoe and it goes specifically under my big toe and I'll like, push hard on it.

C: Oh, and you're like "ah that's the stuff"?

H: Yeah it feels great. I love that. Or when I have an itch, I really like it. I'll just wait until I scratch it, you know?

C: Like how I keep trying to control the structure of this interview. I needed to keep saying aloud how I was going to do it and to try to make it linear. I need to scratch right now.

H: Maybe this is something that we can work on with you haha.

C: That's why our friendship has always worked maybe, because you are not tight, you're very loose. You challenge my perception of how things should go, you know? I feel safe to be loose with you. It's one of the most positive experience of my life, honestly. I think that's what people get out of your work too

H: Awww. Yes, I think the whole thing I'm really trying to do here, if we make it so simple: I'm trying to make you feel good. I really just want to bring joy.

CONTRIBUTORS

HOSSEI (b. 1985, Tehran) is a multidisciplinary Australian artist with Persian, Turkish and Russian ancestry. Across performance, voice and choral performance, his practice addresses his heritage, fantasies and feelings, and notions of togetherness and healing. He adopts themes of secrecy, the unconscious, theatricality and mysticism to create surreal scenarios through real and imagined characters. Recently his work has addressed his mother as a subject, entering her psyche and telling her life experiences and stories.

HOSSEI holds a Bachelor of Visual Arts (Honours) of Fine Arts at Sydney College of the Arts. HOSSEI was selected for Primavera 2014: Young Australian Artists at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia. his work has been included in programs for Parramatta Artist Studios', Artspace, SCA and Dark Mofo. He was a Parramatta Artist Studios resident (2014-2015), an Artspace resident artist (2016), and a PAS Open Digital Resident (2021-2022). HOSSEI will present a new commission in 2023 for West Space gallery at Collingwood Yards, Melbourne. HOSSEI is the recipient of 2022 UTS Artist in Residence where he will work with the faculty of Design, Architecture and Building for 12 months. The residency culminates in public presentation of new work at UTS in 2023.

Timo Rissanen is a fashion and textiles researcher with an interest in the interconnection between sustainability and social justice as they relate to the contemporary fashion industry. He is Associate Professor, School of Design at UTS and was research partner for the 2022-23 UTS Artist in Residence.

Claire Finneran is a writer and artist living and working on Gadigal and Dharug land. She is recovering from a decade of lifestyle journalism (national editor at Time Out and The Thousands) and is currently a programs officer at Parramatta Artists' Studios.

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FEELING BLESSED

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HOSSEI

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Artist in Residence: HOSSEI

UTS Research Partner: Associate Professor Timo Rissanen

UTS Faculty Partner: Faculty of Design, Architecture & Building

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