Seamstress

by Michele Bannister

I have the measurements of your very skin.
This is my integument against uncertainty: twenty-one layers to fit your form,
spandex, nylon, mylar, and hope —
the last stitched down with ragged edges.

I must be as precise as the width of the eye of my needle,
as precise as your launch window;
you can measure the movements of the planets to millimetres,
but oh, unforgiving gravity, and you in less than half a centimetre of my care.

This piecing for the curve of your hips; this for the arch of your back.
Now the fiddly seams around the bust; a crease is eighteen hours of torment.

There is such grace in every arc from pad to orbit; you tell me
and for the delight in your eyes, I will see it too —
and check the tolerances three more times. And again after lunch.

I quilt beside the cooling pipes. This stitch will lie next to your heart;
in silken metal I add the dogwood-petal circuits your grandmother loved.
But for the gloves, grass-green and gold, I embroider all the flowers of our garden —

It is the aluminium gleam that catches in my eye. So bright
as acid as the glare
when you see that first sunrise from orbit; they say the glory
of that thin layer of lightning-quilted atmosphere, excruciating blue,
is heartbreaking.

Michele Bannister is a member of the Outer Solar Systems Origins Survey and a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada. “Seamstress” was first published in issue no. 7 of Stone Telling (http://stonetelling.com/issue7-mar2012/bannister-seamstress.html).

The Real Story

Writer and poet Julia Rios interviewed Bannister about “Seamstress.” This excerpt is reprinted with permission. For the full interview, see http://stonetelling.com/issue7-mar2012/rios-st7-roundtable.html.

“I wrote this poem after reading of the women who outcompeted large companies to obtain NASA’s contract for the Apollo spacesuits. They individually crafted each spacesuit, and a lot of details in the poem reflect the requirements of their technical precision. In a future where such skill in craft remains valued, what better gift for an astronaut than a personalized spacesuit? The details the seamstress-protagonist adds touch on history: the Apollo 12 moonwalkers found pinup pictures added among the pages of their wrist checklists, and modern suits contain splashes of color to help visually distinguish spacewalking astronauts.

I also wanted to subvert the narratives that surround the Apollo program, with its heroic exploration-era emphasis on individual masculinity. This future values the traditionally female pursuit of fabric-work, the gentleness of gardening, and the love of the astronaut and her wife. But this story also sits firmly within the heroic tradition of romantic poems. In that context, these people are both extraordinary not in who they are, but in what they do. Theirs is a future in which their love and strength are celebrated, as surely as any astronaut and partner’s resolution in the face of uncertainty has ever been.”
Astrophysics
by Bronwyn Lovell

Beside the telescope, I ask Dad if he ever tires of the same old objects night after night, year after year. He says each viewing has its own quality, just as the particles in any breath of air are unique. He’s checking in on constant friends as they rise and waltz across a ballroom sky (ladies’ diamantes glittering, men’s dress shoes shining) and that dazzle, for him, could never grow dim.

Hands snug in snow-jacket pockets, I ask if he believes that the pull of planets affects humans, as astrologers would claim. He says, Bullshit. It’s all too far away. But what about the moon? I say. And the way blood gushes from women in tides? Yes, he concedes, that is amazing. I ask about UFOs. He says, if so, our aliens are likely just humans from the future who found a way to fold time—disciples of Einstein. Ah, so you believe in time travel then? I smile. Look up, he says. You’re doing it now.

Bronwyn Lovell lives in Melbourne, Australia. Her poetry has appeared in numerous publications, including Award Winning Australian Writing, Australian Poetry Journal, Australian Love Poems, Antipodes, Cordite Poetry Review, and the Global Poetry Anthology. Bronwyn has won the Adrien Abbott Poetry Prize and been shortlisted for the Newcastle, Bridport, and Montreal prizes. She works for Australian Poetry and is writing her first verse novel (www.bronwynlovell.com).