



# **Kasia Töns Panoply**

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# Kasia Töns

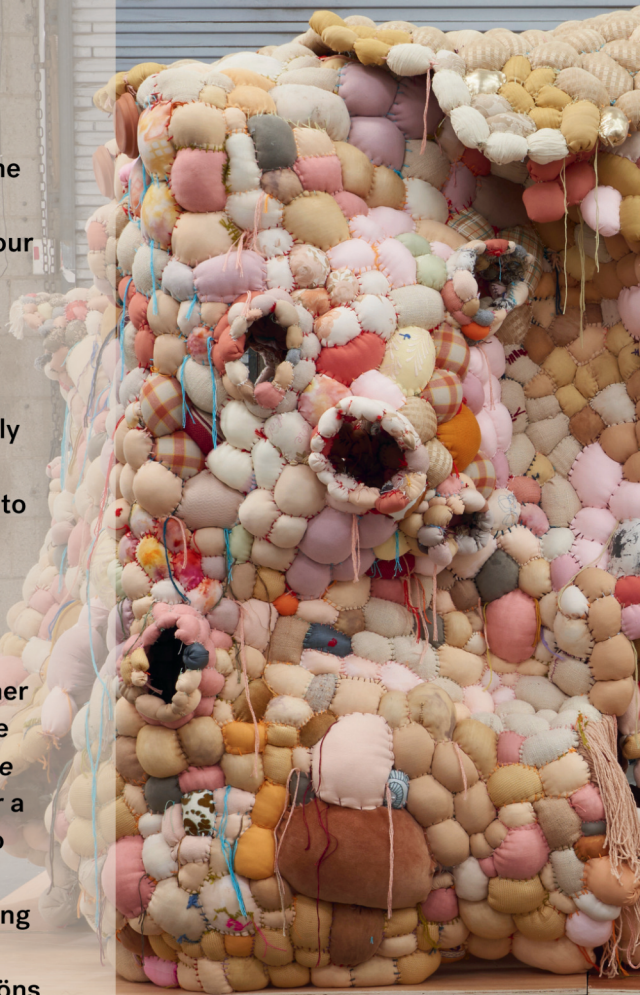
## Panoply

Where armour becomes amour.

Imagine a place where to be home is to be held. Where strength is shaped by softness. Where armour becomes amour.

Kasia Töns' *Panoply* is all of this and more. Stemming from the Greek *panoplia*, the word panoply historically denoted a suit of armour, before it transformed into a spiritual armour of sorts, and then into its contemporary use meaning a magnificent array.

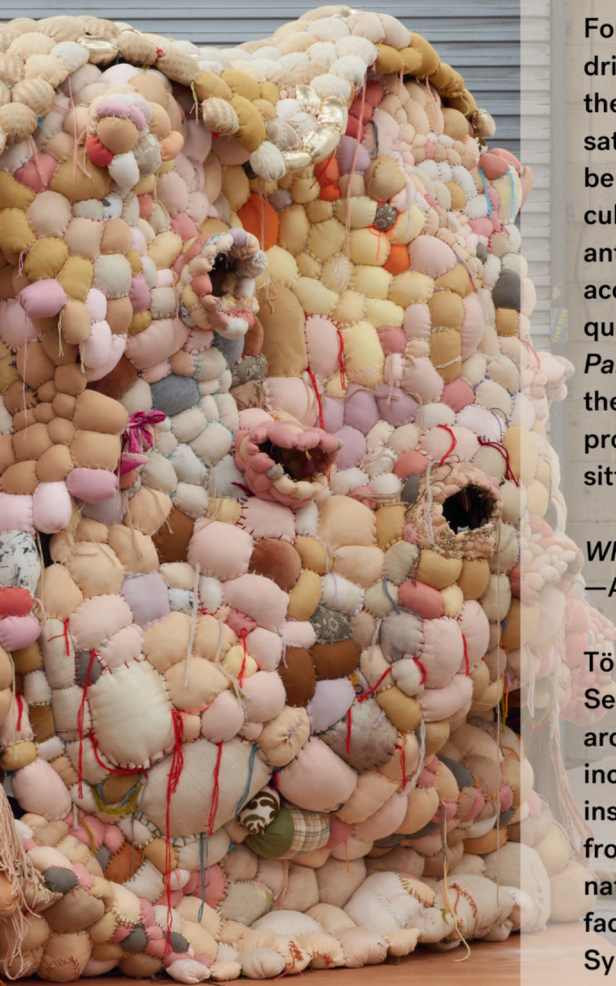
Töns' magnificent array here is her most ambitious project yet in the ongoing practice of *making home* that she has undertaken for over a decade and one that lies close to her heart. Laboriously and ritualistically stitching and stuffing this panoply from remnant and repurposed fabrics and filling, Töns has lovingly threaded womb-like comfort into her protective shelter responding to displacement.



Cover Image: Kasia Töns, *Panoply II (detail)* © The artist.  
Photo: Sam Roberts.

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Photo: Sam Roberts.





For many years, the artist has been driven by questions such as: What are the essentials we need to be satisfied? ... to be comfortable? ... to be safe? and How can the slowness cultivated by art-making act as an antidote to the technological acceleration of modern life? These questions are crafted into the being of *Panoply*, and, like all good questions, they lead to many more which prompts this reflection in three parts sitting alongside Töns' work.

### *What is a 'Home'?*

—Abeer Seikaly

Töns cites the influence of Abeer Seikaly, a Jordanian-Palestinian architect and artist whose projects including *Weaving a Home* seek to inspire practical living spaces drawing from traditional crafts and embedding nature and sustainability into all facets of life.<sup>1</sup> In an interview with Syrian-American architect Lina Sergie Attar, Seikaly expresses that her concept of home transcends physical boundaries and is “a shelter that we create for ourselves, offering comfort and belonging wherever we are.”<sup>2</sup>

Töns too, views being “at home” as a practice of attending to the emotions and psychology of a space, in any setting. Her years of off-grid living and travel—including hiking from Meningie to Mount Gambier without a tent and making home camps in the bushes along the Coorong—have taught her about autonomy, safety and vulnerability. This way of living has also generated the resourcefulness that seeps into every fibre of her work; the fleshy colours of her plant-dyed fabrics are able to act as an extension of the body while at the same time reminding us that we are inextricably connected to the natural and more-than-human world.

While Töns’ work is embedded with a connection to the natural world, its very nature as a place of refuge also evokes a counterpart: the broader *disconnection* of anthropocentric practices that have served capitalism and cultivated climate change. Responding to such times of upheaval may lead us to precarity, asking:

*What if precarity is the condition of our time?*

—Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing

In her book *The Mushroom at the End of the World* American anthropologist and author Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing asks, what if, instead of being an exception to how we believe the world should work, precarity is the condition of our time?<sup>3</sup> Looking through the cracks-becoming-crevasses infiltrating the false dreams of modernisation and progress we can no longer ignore the humanmade disasters of widespread extinctions, landscape degradation, rising sea levels, capitalism, colonialism and



Image: Kasia Töns, *Panoply* © The artist.  
Photo: Sam Roberts



racism. But what if we take up Lowenhaupt Tsing's call to "look for what has been ignored because it never fit the timeline of progress"?<sup>4</sup> What if precarity allows us to become more vulnerable to others? ... more attuned to our surroundings?

Over cups of tea Töns and I talk about a seal helping to save a diver from drowning<sup>5</sup>, about buildings purifying the air around them<sup>6</sup>, about her off-grid ger (a yurt-like home) surrounded by tawny frogmouths, snails and insects. She remembers feeling the warmth of her ger "like a hug," in contrast to the loneliness she has previously experienced in more conventional homes. The artist credits these experiences as shaping her *Panoply* into a shelter for a "future self", perhaps responding to a un/natural disaster, financial instability or some other precarity and asking:

*How can we live in the world of possibility?*  
—Kasia Töns

For Töns, this world of possibility offers hope and comfort while being streetwise, plant-wise and resilient. The cushioned modularity and multiple entry points of this shelter give it the ability to become smaller or larger as needed, as well as the potential to connect to other panoplies for communal dwelling and connection. Its uniquely positioned windows allow privacy and retreat by allowing inhabitants to look out but not easily allowing others to look in. As much as we would like to peel back a cumulus door and step inside, this shelter is not for the voyeur.



Image: Kasia Töns, *Belinda Mask* © The artist.  
Photo: Sam Roberts.



Nonetheless, we are not left out in the cold. We are left with a model of making home that prioritises comfort, dignity and community despite, or because of, the precarity of our time. I recall reading an article about the Barefoot College in India teaching illiterate grandmothers who have never left their villages to become solar engineers. The founder Bunker Roy explains that instead of training men who are likely to take their new skills and leave for the city, the grandmothers return home “like tigers” as carers and teachers able to transform and future-proof their villages.<sup>7</sup> Like *Panoply*, the armour/amour of these women holds space for uncertainty, risk, courage and strength as it enacts an alternative future.

Tigers too, are soft.

— Heidi Kenyon, 2023

1. “Abeer Seikaly, Weaving a Home,” <https://abeerseikaly.com/weaving-a-home-2020/>.
2. Lina Sergie Attar, host, “Understanding Belonging through Design and Displacement: A Conversation with Abeer Seikaly and Yousef Yousef,” *Belongings: Conversations about Home* (podcast), August 20, 2023, <https://podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/belongings/id1654251248?i=1000624985728>.
3. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2015), 20–21.
4. *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, 21.
5. “Seal helps save man from drowning in freezing water,” <https://www.pennlive.com/life/2022/02/seal-helps-save-man-from-drowning-in-freezing-water.html>.
6. “The buildings that clean our air,” <https://www.tdma.info/uses-of-titanium-dioxide/the-buildings-that-clean-our-air/>.
7. Livia Albeck-Ripka, “Portrait Equality,” *Dumbo Feather*, March 4, 2014, <https://www.dumbofeather.com/articles/portrait-equality/>.

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