

# THE JOY OF LACE

Forget frilly doilies and pillowcases, something exciting – and even a little bit saucy – is happening in the



## Karen Nicol

The catwalk loves Karen Nicol. As well as supplying handmade lace and embroidery designs for clients such as Chloe, Julien Macdonald, John Rocha and Matthew Williamson, it was Nicol who, earlier this year, sent out models in 'skull-and-crossbones' lace for Clements Ribeiro's 2005 autumn/winter show.

'I love the idea of spending time on something almost throwaway, like taking old bits of sack and adding pearls and lace,' she enthuses. 'I worked on a lace dress for Antonio Berardi which was designed with all the bobbins hanging from the bottom as you walked. We got the lace made in Italy and it took the whole village three or four weeks. In the end the mayor gave it to him because they couldn't begin to price it.'

Now Nicol has designed her own



over jeans or dresses. The collection, 'A Dash of Spirit', goes on show in London next month.

Although Nicol learned the centuries-old techniques of lacemaking when she trained as an embroiderer (she is now a senior lecturer in mixed-media textiles at the Royal College of Art), this collection is about new ways of making lace. The skirt pieces are made from threads and fabrics from flea-markets and junkshops. 'I find the quality and weight of old-fashioned haberdashery so beautiful,' she says. As the lacy template of the 'skirt' builds up, she paints areas or incorporates mixed-media elements – dogs, birds, flowers, plastic toys.

Thanks to fashion's current love affair with ladylike dressing – black lace from Miu Miu, Valentino and Versace, Victoriana at Yves St Laurent – Nicol's design studio is

**Flights of fancy:** (clockwise, from top left) detail of a Karen Nicol lace design; close-up of Danica Maier's wall-based art; white skirt by Nicol; the artist (with lace throw) at home

the erotic boutique Coco de Mer why the sudden demand? Simple, says Nicol: 'Lace makes you feel special. Women behave differently when wearing it.'

