Wonderland is a collaborative project between artist/designer Helen Storey, scientist Tony Ryan and textile designers from Interface at the University of Ulster Belfast led by Trish Belford. In 2005 Helen, who had already produced three art/science projects was thinking about new solutions for the problem of excess packaging and waste. She heard Tony on the radio, called him and naively asked the question “Can a bottle have intelligence and tell itself when it is empty and then disappear?” Tony’s response was to invite her to the University of Sheffield to discuss and develop this idea. After much experimentation they decided to work together and investigate this further.

First, they set about creating the bottle that could disappear. Their work in progress can be seen in the glorious Wonder Shed, which elucidates how they created experimental bottles that become flowers. They soon realised however that if they could make dresses disappear (Helen trained and worked for many years as a fashion designer) this might be more powerfully symbolic and a way of stimulating public debate about how science and art can work together to look at new solutions to world problems.

Helen called Trish in Belfast to ask her if Interface could help design fabrics for the dresses made from PVA that could dissolve when drowned in water. The results of their explorations and dialogue are seen in this exhibition together with the processes and the response from others.

The results, five extraordinary dresses that form just a part of Wonderland will disappear bit by bit and vanish completely by the end of the exhibition.

Several films documenting the story of Wonderland including ‘Wonderland’ by Nick Knight and SHOWstudio will be on show and an illustrated timeline depicting how the Interface team made the textiles for the dresses will wrap around the wall of Gallery 4.

The work attempts to show that Plastics are Precious and are as described by Tony Ryan, “buried sunshine”.

Wonderland is touring the UK and has been seen by three million people. It is a celebration of the power of shared ideas. The Wonderland team believe that the future of the planet cannot be solved by ‘turning back the clock’ and returning to a non-scientific age. This project is an example of art, science and technology in action and shows that if society can embrace science, it can influence science and the results benefit everyone. It is human nature to develop and improve.

Tony, Helen and colleagues are also working on other astounding ideas that have emerged over the last three years, and are a direct result of their dialogue.
www.wonderland-belfast.co.uk

“The collection of art is so beautiful despite being constructed from plastic and industrial materials it remains delicate and soft in appearance” —Visitor, London, February 2008

“Merging the fields of technology, chemistry, art and fashion, Wonderland evokes an element of magic that connects the viewer with an important underlying message” —WGSN, The world’s leading online service for fashion and style

Triptych
Photography / Nick Knight
Model / Alice Dellal at Select
Make Up / Hannah Murray at Julian Watson
Hair / Erimo Hughes at Premier
Stylist / Jonathan Kaye at Katy Barker

by Professor Helen Storey, London College of Fashion, Professor Tony Ryan, the University of Sheffield and in association with Interface, the University of Ulster