

# Basic Detail Report

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**Title**

Zimmermann 'Woollen Mermaid' swimsuit

**Date**

2009

**Primary Maker**

Zimmermann

**Medium**

Wool, elastane (spandex or Lycra)

**Dimensions**

Overall: 520 x 380 x 40 mm, 150 g

**Name**

Swimsuit

**History**

Zimmermann, launched in 1990 by Simone and Nicki Zimmermann, produces swimwear, womenswear and accessories. Originally made in the garage of the family home in Cronulla, the label is now sold at concept stores in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and the Gold Coast, with selected designs available in both national and international department stores and specialty boutiques. Designer Nicki Zimmermann aims to create fashionable yet affordable pieces, offering a local interpretation of international fashion trends.

Zimmermann designs have been featured in the swimwear issue of the US magazine, Sports Illustrated, and have regularly featured in Elle, Harpers Bazaar, Marie Claire and Vogue throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Zimmermann is one of the contemporary swimwear designers invited to reinterpret the classic one-piece swimsuit using a technologically advanced wool/elastane textile for the Australian National Maritime Museum's 2009 exhibition 'Exposed! The Story of Swimwear'. The use of this fabric articulates the technological importance of performance textiles to fashioning a modern garment, whilst acknowledging the importance of wool as a yarn to Australia and the swimsuit's history. Zimmermann's design statement for the 'Woollen Mermaid' project reads as follows: 'The use of a natural fibre such as wool really lent itself to Zimmermann's sculptural take on the one piece. The woollen swimwear of the past appeared frumpy, restrictive and uncomfortable, totally at odds with the Australian lifestyle and the mermaids I see on Sydney's beaches everyday. I aimed to make a piece that would look as at home in today's context... beautiful, wearable and modern.' In the early 20th century most swimsuits were produced in wool, in part due to its ability to reveal less of the body when wet. There was early experimentation with developing rib-like knits that were more elastic, followed by the use of Lastex, a rubber yarn that created a garment with less sag and drag. In the 21st century, advances in textile technology have resulted in the development of

wool jersey fabrics with a high compression Lycra component. Looking to the past and designing for the future, the swimsuit designs embody a contemporary aesthetic and active glamour inspired by the original mermaid, Annette Kellerman. Kellerman (1886-1975) was the 'Australian Mermaid,' the 'Diving Venus' and the 'Perfect Woman.' Through a career as a long distance swimmer, diver, vaudeville performer and silent movie star she became a global identity associated with glamour and physical beauty. She was the first woman to attempt to swim the English Channel, and swam her way across Europe and the United States. Kellerman was a controversial individual. She was allegedly arrested for indecency preparing to swim along the coastline at Revere Beach, Boston in 1907 and expressed her independence and self-possession through bodily spectacle in daring swimsuits styled on the existing one-piece swimsuit design for men. There were initially no modifications made to the original, masculine design; no structuring to the contours of a woman's body, in particular the breast area, and it would not be until the 1930s that designers would feminise the swimsuit, and new technology would assist the development of textiles that would enhance its fit and performance. Kellerman's innovation was revealing the female body, which had been concealed beneath layers of clothes and corsets for centuries in the public arena. She was a role model for women, encouraging self-motivation and self-development. Kellerman extolled the virtues of exercise and a healthy diet to shape the body naturally. In 1918 her book 'Physical Beauty: How to Keep It' was published, and it promised that through a series of simple daily exercises in the home, every woman could achieve a level of physical beauty that was essential to the wearing of a body hugging one-piece swimsuit with confidence. As a prototypical Hollywood star she prefigured the celebrity culture focused on the body that has predominated since then.