



Material Reverie

TOWN HALL GALLERY
HAWTHORN ARTS CENTRE

THURS 20 JANUARY – SAT 9 APRIL 2022

Dream Weaver

The natural and constructed worlds are rich repositories of art materials and subject matter. Artists throughout history have marvelled at the sublime and manifest beauty of our surrounds, and in response, have created tools, mark making techniques, and methods of production to capture their impressions of the world. 'Material Reverie' is a major group exhibition at Town Hall Gallery exploring the rich variety of materials contemporary Australian artists find at their fingertips. Natural fibres and minerals with deep histories and traditions are exhibited alongside treasured or discarded everyday items fabricated by hand or by modern production lines. Clothing, toys, car parts and household items are collected, foraged and upcycled to create magnificent artworks with new meaning and beauty.

Eight exhibiting artists investigate the intrinsic physical and conceptual properties of plastic, organic matter, synthetic fabrics and metals, challenging how they have been used throughout history in domestic, commercial or art contexts. These materials have been co-opted by the artist, translated through traditional weaving, painting and sculpting techniques, alongside more contemporary approaches to design, assemblage and collage. 'Material Reverie' celebrates the transformative potential of the relationship between imagination and craftsmanship.

Foraging materials from the land enables Taungurung woman Cassie Leatham to walk in the footsteps of her ancestors. Gathering precious natural resources from the environment near

her home on Gunaikurnai land, Cassie transforms native grasses and plant fibres, pipe clay, ochre, emu feathers and more, into beautiful objects that draw on her Aboriginal culture. Cassie's installation 'PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE', 2022, teaches about the impacts of climate change. 'We have to protect and look after country and make sure ancestors' ways continue.' Cassie says. 'Native and natural resources must be protected for future generations to learn and skill share with Elders.'¹ Applying traditional practices and using materials that would otherwise decompose into country, this magnificent collection of new works – tiny clay ochre pots, large coolamon grass carriers and bowls, an eel trap and a snake bone necklace – alongside healing mats and midden pots from the Town Hall Gallery Collection, emphasises the importance of environmental and cultural protection.

Also deeply concerned with the environmental impacts of her art practice, Jahnne Pasco-White incorporates organic materials into the traditional process of acrylic painting. Coloured with natural pigments extracted from household waste and feral fruit, Jahnne's many-layered, large-scale abstract paintings often begin with previous works and found fabrics. Items such as socks, paper notes and her daughter's drawings are cut into pieces, then reconfigured together upon loose, unstretched canvas, cotton or linen.² Mothering and networks of kinship, and the continual processes of decay and renewal, underpins Jahnne's atmospheric assemblages. On display is 'Making Kin', 2020, including three highly textured linen panels, dyed with

pigments from avocado, black bean, sunflower, copper, beech leaves, and carrots. This 'beautiful, meandering composition'³ has clusters of intense pastel pinks and blues, and patches of muddy earthy tones, accented with the artist's lines and hatching marks in oil stick, crayon, and pencil. 'Making Kin' is a celebration of the interconnectedness of Jahnne's home and studio.

For decades Louise Saxton has collected glorious examples of vintage needlework, primarily hand-made embroidery and lace that reference flora and fauna. Committed to the elevation of women's traditional craft within the hierarchy of the art world, her practice draws a connection between disappearing domestic textile traditions and materials, and

Similarly interested in the interconnectedness of natural and urban environments, Dana Harris creates tenderly hand-crafted, intricate drawings, weavings and installations that investigate experiences of space. Fascinated with the process of mapping and interpreting site-specific data, Dana uses a variety of techniques and media – tracing paper, glass mirrors and cotton embroidery yarn – to transfer contextual, kinetic and conceptual information into new artforms. 'Cura et industria (with care and industry)', 2017, from the Town Hall Gallery Collection, is a thirteen-piece project responding to historical maps and archival etchings of Hawthorn and the Boroondara Shire. Dana has meticulously penned, stitched and



vulnerable species in the natural world.⁴ Louise painstakingly extracts and reconfigures fragments of highly detailed, ornamental designs into beautiful large-scale, two and three-dimensional artworks. 'Wall Garden', 2016-2017, from the Town Hall Gallery Collection, is a large hanging assemblage comprising clusters of vibrantly coloured, lush embroidery precariously pinned to a swathe of bridal tulle. Each cluster represents a unique garden or 'world', citing the urban practice of vertical gardens which are created to address the shrinking greenspaces within cities.⁵

woven the roads, river systems, and generous sized plots of land, alluding to the wealth of the European settlement.⁶ Phosphorescent paint is embedded in the woven works, offering the secret ability to glow under different light conditions. Also on display are recent and new poetic interpretations of sites, where taut fine lines, rich colours and forms are rendered through the humble, repetitive action of handknitting and knotting.⁷

Abstract painter Robert Brown has rescued scrap materials from the Melbourne streets on his daily walks since 2017. Now holding an extensive

collection of hubcaps, bike wheels, lampshades, and the odd wooden chair and mirror, Robert unlocks the potential of these discarded everyday objects to become vibrant new artworks. He is particularly drawn to hubcaps which provide an excellent surface for painting once they are thoroughly cleaned of grease.⁸

Robert has always been an artist and was encouraged to pursue art by his support worker and sculptor, Rick Doyer. Robert's love of flowers and gardens, including the roses outside his house, are often referenced in his work. He says, 'I've been painting flowers for a long while, I like it, I like it that way, I love it..... Roses..... I like em they're good..... I got one out the front it's growing, it's orange blue red blue orange and red..... I'll pick one for you, I'll get you one..... you'll love it.'⁹ Robert's creative approach is intuitive; he often uses Posca pens to sketch lines and shapes before the spontaneous layering of Pop and fluoro-coloured floral motifs in acrylic paint. 'Hub caps from my walks', 2022, is a joyful new installation of Robert's kaleidoscopic disks that ascend across the gallery wall, commissioned by the Town Hall Gallery.

'Material Reverie' also features five free-standing, organic sculptures by Shigemi Iwama from the Town Hall Gallery Collection, that in the words of the artist have been 'released from the earthbound'. She explains, 'ceramic can be a fairly heavy material, so I like to make my forms appear light or even fragile. For this reason, they begin from a small base or "point of contact" as I wish to give the impression that they are floating or surging upwards.'¹⁰ Shigemi often adds grogs (fired and crushed ceramics) to clay to enhance the strength and textured appearance of her transcendent sculptures. These harmonious designs are informed by the technical proficiency

and aesthetic qualities of Ikebana (Japanese flower arrangement), an art of placement, rhythm, line and asymmetrical balance.¹¹ Each surface has been scraped and marked to imply the artist made a single, definite stroke, like a continuous line in drawing.¹²



Further challenging assumptions about materials and traditions, Teelah George explores how the perceived value and status of textiles can be re-evaluated in relation to other materials. Often using cardboard, Blu Tack, found banners, and bronze, Teelah's works are subject to constant evolution, accumulating meaning as relationships are formed between materials and space, time and labour, light and architecture, and the conversations that take place between her work and the surrounding works on display.¹³ 'Wall Piece', 2017, is a 3.5m wide embroidery, comprising segments of stitched beige linen with staggered layers of white cotton thread, suspended from bronze supports. This large textile subverts the notion of the fixed gallery wall – the predominant mode of conceptual and literal presentation for artworks –

hanging as both a magnificent feat of craftsmanship and a proxy for gallery architecture.¹⁴

Also creating meaning through proximity, Lou Hubbard creates absurdist assemblages from furniture, toys, keepsakes and junk; found items and personal relics she dissects then shapes into new formal relationships. Using familiar objects from everyday life, Lou's poetic juxtapositions challenge our expected associations to reveal latent meaning. Often activating human traits in inanimate objects, Lou tactfully places Pop motifs, simple shapes and popping cartoon eyes, to create humorous and strangely sentimental works that interrogate the nature of training, submission and subordination.¹⁵ Exhibiting refreshed iterations of existing works; 'A Scuffle from 'The Léger Melee'', 2021, is a module from the artwork 'The Léger Melee', 2018, where kids' dinosaur

chairs, inflatable Zimmer frames (walking frames) and hosiery have become 'players' in a dramatic scuffle. Nearby, a portable camp oven, clothes horse, acrylic painted light bulbs and a neon green lycra screen compose 'Smoker (toy crematory)', 2020, a stand-in for bodily impulses, internal organs and bodies compressed and evacuated.¹⁶ These common domestic materials have been selected and posed, and ultimately subjected to a process of anthropomorphism.

Drawing awareness to the ways we engage with natural and man-made resources and take meaning from objects, 'Material Reverie' celebrates the transformative potential of matter through creativity, resulting in a dreamlike combination of new and beautiful artworks.

Essay by Town Hall Gallery Curator Rachel Keir-Smith.

1 Cassie Leatham, email correspondence, August 2021

2 Clare Needham, "In conversation with contemporary artist Jahanne Pasco-White", Bendigo Art Gallery, 19 July 2021, <https://www.bendigoregion.com.au/bendigo-art-gallery/blogs/in-conversation-with-contemporary-artist-jahanne-pasco-white>

3 Nadiah Abdulrahim, "Jahanne Pasco-White", Art Guide Australia, 27 February 2019 <https://artguide.com.au/jahanne-pasco-white>

4 Louise Saxton, email correspondence, August 2021

5 Ibid.

6 "Projects: cura et industria", Dana Harris, accessed 14 September 2021, <https://danaharris.com.au/works/cura-et-industria>

7 Dana Harris, email correspondence, August 2021

8 Kate Stodart (Arts Access Victoria), email correspondence, August 2021

9 Ibid.

10 Shigemi Iwama, email correspondence, July 2021

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Teelah George, email correspondence, August 2021

14 Teelah George, email correspondence, October 2021

15 "Lou Hubbard", Sarah Scout Presents, accessed 20 August 2021, <https://www.sarahscoutpresents.com/artists/38-lou-hubbard/overview/>

16 Lou Hubbard, email correspondence, August 2021



COVER:

Louise Saxton, detail from 'Wall Garden', 2016-2017, reclaimed needlework, lace-pins, nylon tulle, acrylic baton, 300 x 192 cm, image courtesy of the artist, Gould Creative and Town Hall Gallery Collection. Photography by Gavin Hansford.

CENTRE SPREAD:

Robert Brown, detail from 'Hub caps from my walks', 2021, recycled hub caps, acrylic paint and Posca pens, dimensions variable, image courtesy of the artist and Arts Access Victoria.

Shigemi Iwama, 'Contemplation II', 1994, stoneware and grogs, 46 (h) x 33 (d) cm, image courtesy of the artist and Town Hall Gallery Collection.

ABOVE:

Cassie Leatham, 'Mon Mungan (healing weave)', 2020, native grass (Lomandra) and emu feathers, 1m diameter, Town Hall Gallery Collection. Photography by Christian Capurro.

OPENING HOURS

10am – 4pm, Mon to Fri
Midday – 4pm, Saturday

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