

Primavera 07 Exhibition by Young Australian Artists

TEACHER NOTES

Primavera 07
MCA Galleries Level 1 and 2
24 August – 4 November 2007

INTRODUCTION

The MCA has provided these notes to assist teachers with planning excursions to *Primavera 07* and devising post-visit assignments linked to the exhibition. We have formatted these notes in order of viewing the exhibition from the beginning of MCA Level 1 galleries to the final room of MCA Level 2/Mezzanine galleries, and provided a key image for each artist. These notes were written by *Primavera 07* curator Christine Morrow.

For further artist and artwork information, images and essays please see the fully-illustrated *Primavera 07 Exhibition by Young Australian Artists* catalogue, available from the MCA Store for \$24.95.

Primavera 07 is the ideal context for the study of Artist's Practice, the Conceptual Framework and the Frames (especially the Postmodern and Structural Frames) at Secondary level. The range of materials and methods in the exhibition also provides an engaging introduction to knowing about and making contemporary art for Primary level students.

For further information on MCA practical and theoretical programs for K-12 students, linking your classroom programs to the exhibition, or booking an excursion to *Primavera 07*, please contact MCA Learning on education@mca.com.au or 02 9245 2484.

CURATORIAL OVERVIEW

The curator of *Primavera 07* is MCA Curator Christine Morrow.

Exhibition Purpose

Primavera is an annual exhibition for Australian artists 35 years of age and under. It was initiated in 1991 by Dr Edward and Mrs Cynthia Jackson and their family in memory of their daughter Belinda Jackson, a talented jeweller who passed away in 1990 at the age of 29. The exhibition commemorates Belinda Jackson by celebrating the creative achievements of talented young artists who are in the early stages of their careers. It is one of the highlights of the MCA's annual program of exhibitions.

Exhibition Theme

Primavera 07 focuses on the idea of *form* and *formlessness*. In many of the artists' works, there are even transitions between the two states. Some of the ways in which the themes of form and formlessness manifest are through the motifs of: rupture, spillage, gaps, fragmentation, patterning, malleability, the tension between figuration and abstraction, positive and negative space, an emphasis on materiality and material deceptions.

Artists

Nine individual artists have been selected for *Primavera 07*. They are: Patrick Doherty (WA), Honor Freeman (SA→NSW), Briele Hansen (VIC), Anthony Johnson (TAS), Justine Khamara (VIC), Jess MacNeil (NSW→UK), Amanda Marburg (VIC), Katie Moore (SA→QLD), Martin Smith (QLD)

Media

The different disciplines featured in the exhibition include painting, sculpture, photography, video, installations, and ceramics.

PRIMAVERA 07 – ARTIST AND ARTWORK INFORMATION

Artists on MCA Level 1 Galleries

ANTHONY JOHNSON

Anthony Johnson is represented by two works. One of these, *Upgrade*, depicts an oversized fridge cabinet squashed awkwardly into the space of the gallery. It is based on the fridge cabinet from a flat Johnson lived in at the time; its size created expectations about material possessions that the artist couldn't meet. Scaling it up plays on the idea of upgrading to a bigger (read: "better") appliance. It's a kind of "keeping up with the Jones's" conundrum. The overblown fridge unit addresses our contemporary acceptance of over-consumption, as the 'upsized' portions offered by fast food chains and the suburban housing phenomenon of the so-called 'McMansion' demonstrates. This work also involves a private joke about the status of the artist. The fridge cabinet is a type of self portrait. Inclusion in *Primavera* represents an increase in Anthony Johnson's profile, so his fridge unit has inflated accordingly.

The other work, *Downgrade*, consists of piles of pine IKEA furniture, a garden mulcher and a beanbag. Over time, pieces of the IKEA furniture are broken up and put through the mulcher. The woodchip that results is then shovelled into the beanbag as stuffing. Over the course of the exhibition, the pile of furniture diminishes and the beanbag gets fuller. This all happens unseen as it is done by exhibition preparators after hours. There is an element of sociological enquiry, and social critique, behind Johnson's explorations. Upgrading and downgrading, these demographic and economic descriptors define people by their labour, earnings, consumption, lifestyle and accrual of material possessions. The artist puts the middle-class relationship with material wealth under the microscope

Themes and issues for discussion: both works

- Class (bourgeois vs. bohemian)
- The role material possessions play in our lives
- Over-consumption
- Absurdism
- Upgrading, down-grading, seachanging, aspirational: the meanings attached to some of these economic and demographic terms

Themes and issues for discussion: *Downgrade*

- Rigid rectilinear furniture vs. organic shape of beanbag
- Rigid rectilinear furniture vs. formless mound of woodchips
- Mass production (mass produced furnishings, but also mass produced woodchips)
- Anarchy/destruction
- When we are finished with personal documents we shred them. Can personal possessions also be dispatched of quickly and cleanly in the same manner?
- Taking recycling to its logical absurdist conclusion?
- Transmutation of material (from solid timber to woodchips)
- Compression – the way that masses of furniture, when shredded, compacts down into almost nothing

Themes and issues for discussion: *Upgrade*

- The idea of "keeping up with the Joneses"
- Site-specific
- Positive and negative space
- Scale

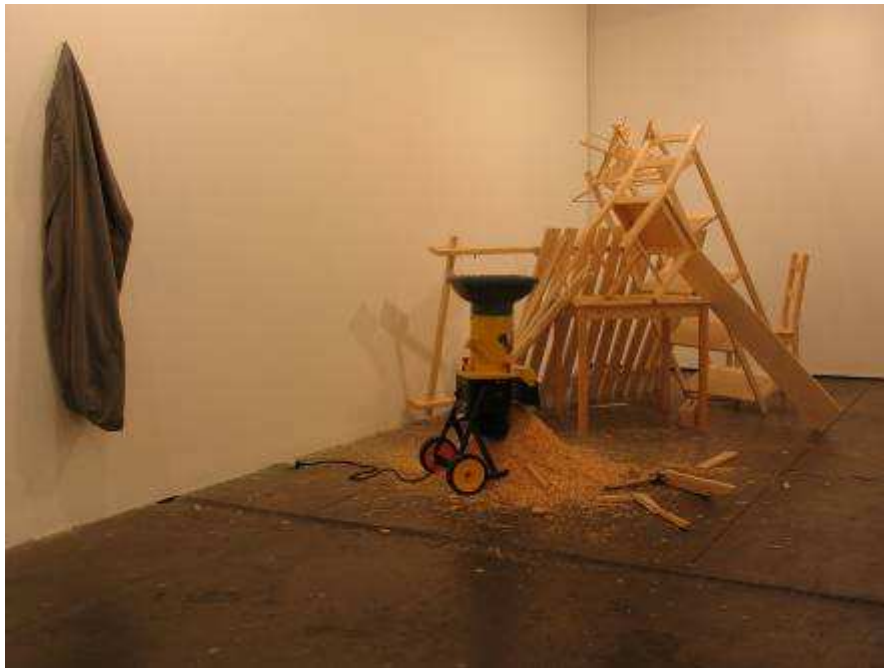
- Absurdity, the need for the object is predicated on having a fridge

Downgrade: How is the work made?

The artist found a bean bag on a hard rubbish collection near where he lives. He decided to put furniture into a garden mulcher and turn it into small wooden particles that can then serve as stuffing for the bean bag. He assembled a lot of cheap pine IKEA furniture. Instead of disassembling it (i.e. taking it apart with screwdrivers and Allen keys) in order to put it into the mulcher piece by piece, he roughly chopped it up with a small axe. Then the rough sections were fed into the mulcher over the course of the exhibition. The mulcher, a power tool designed to chew up tree branches and other green waste in order to provide mulch for the garden, turns the sections of solid wood into wood chip. [Wood chips have many purposes: providing ground cover; an ingredient in making paper, MDF and chipboard; oak wood chips are even put into wine as a way of flavouring it as a cheap substitute for putting it in oak barrels]. The small metal fasteners did not go through the mulcher but were just thrown into the bean bag. The result is that the pile of pine furniture gradually diminishes over the course of the exhibition while the bean bag slowly fills up.

Upgrade: How is the work made?

The first time he showed the work, the artist took the fridge cabinet out of the flat he then occupied, and installed it in a gallery by putting it up on car jacks so it became flush with the ceiling and was thereby custom-fitted to the new space of the gallery. The work has been reinterpreted differently for *Primavera*. Johnson has taken the dimensions of the fridge cabinet from the flat (where he no longer lives) and made a new fridge unit that has the same proportions but is scaled up massively. It is so large that it is jammed in awkwardly to the space.



Anthony Johnson
Downgrade 2005-07
 timber furniture and household items, garden shredder, found bean-bag
 installation dimensions variable
 Courtesy and © the artist

AMANDA MARBURG

Amanda Marburg is represented by a suite of ten paintings. In order to arrive at each finished painting, she selects a film still, recreates the scene it depicts by sculpting it in black-and-white plasticine, lights and photographs the tableau and then uses the two-dimensional photograph as the basis for the oil painting. What results is not a direct painting of a scene but a representation of a representation of a representation.

Marburg's work refers to the past through individual references to classic movies, executed in tonal painting reminiscent of black-and-white film. Her sombre images have their sources in famous films spanning crime, horror, thriller and film noir genres. Plasticine, an inexpensive modelling compound, also evokes nostalgia through its associations with our own childhoods. As well as the paintings, Marburg will produce a new bronze for the exhibition (cast from one of her plasticine models). Marburg's images possess strong narrative content around motifs of good and evil. She depicts scenarios that highlight complex themes of moral and sexual ambivalence, brutality, anxiety and forgetfulness, entrapment and claustrophobia.

Themes and issues for discussion

- emphasis on materiality
- Representation: a painting, of a photograph of a model, of a film still
- Process
- Relationship between two and three dimensions
- Model-making
- Tactility of the plasticine versus the flatness of the painting
- Narrative qualities in the subject matter
- Nostalgia: the way we associate plasticine with our childhoods
- Plasticine as a low art material versus oil paint and bronze as a high art materials
- Leaving a mark: The paintings are quite 'flat' in the sense that the paint brush does not leave a mark, but the plasticine models are covered in thumb and finger prints etc.

How is the work made?

For this series, Marburg has used film stills from Hitchcock films including *Marnie* (*Marnie*) and *Psycho* 1960 (*Rabbit* and *Owl*) as well as from *Frankenstein* 1931 (*Grave Digger* and *Man Crawling*), *Badlands* 1973 (*Kit*), *Wait until Dark* 1967 (*Audrey*), *Hunchback of Notre Dame* 1939 (*Sanctuary*), *Maltese Falcon* 1941 (*Man and Torch*) and *Confidential Report* 1955 (*Professor*). She chooses part of the image as the subject matter for the finished painting. She models the image three-dimensionally in plasticine, making something that looks like a diorama or maquette. For these paintings she used only black and white plasticine but as little coloured bits of plasticine that she was recycling became incorporated, you can see occasional small coloured sections that may be likened to a smudge in an oil painting or the effects of using a dirty brush. Elsewhere, colour creeps into the image, because she sets up the maquette under coloured lights (or even by candle light) that give it a warm or cool cast and then she rephotographs it and works from that photo. While the paintings require labour-intensive detailing, the clay maquettes sometimes take as little as five minutes to make. The artist depicts her subjects so true to the photograph that she even paints her own finger and thumbprints in the plasticine.



Amanda Marburg
Rabbit 2005
oil on canvas
84 x 60 cm
Private collection, Melbourne
© the artist

MARTIN SMITH

Martin Smith's photographs are often based on found images, drawing on the kind of pictures such as everyone has in their family albums. He approaches photography in a way that encourages us to see it in its social contexts rather than either a rarefied aesthetic practice or a mere window onto the real world. While not everyone makes paintings or sculptures, there is a sense in which everybody takes photographs and Smith's work draws on some of the social meanings and features of amateur photography. His photographs feature text cut into all or part of their surface. The letters that are cut from the photographs appear on the floor below the image, reminiscent of fallen autumn leaves.

This even makes the photographs appear like sieves, whose surfaces are opened up or ruptured in some way. There is a sense of cause and effect – a feeling that something has happened and the viewer is witnessing its aftermath. The texts include personal, diaristic, coming-of-age narratives and also song lyrics. The work addresses how we express personal identities through our own amateur photography, our taste in music, often put together as a playlist or a mix tapes. Cutting the text into the front of his photographs may be likened to somehow synthesizing the image with the handwritten narratives that are often written on the backs of images that are stored in boxes and albums that represent personal and family histories. It is as if Smith is bringing this text forward from the reverse of the image and integrating it across the front.

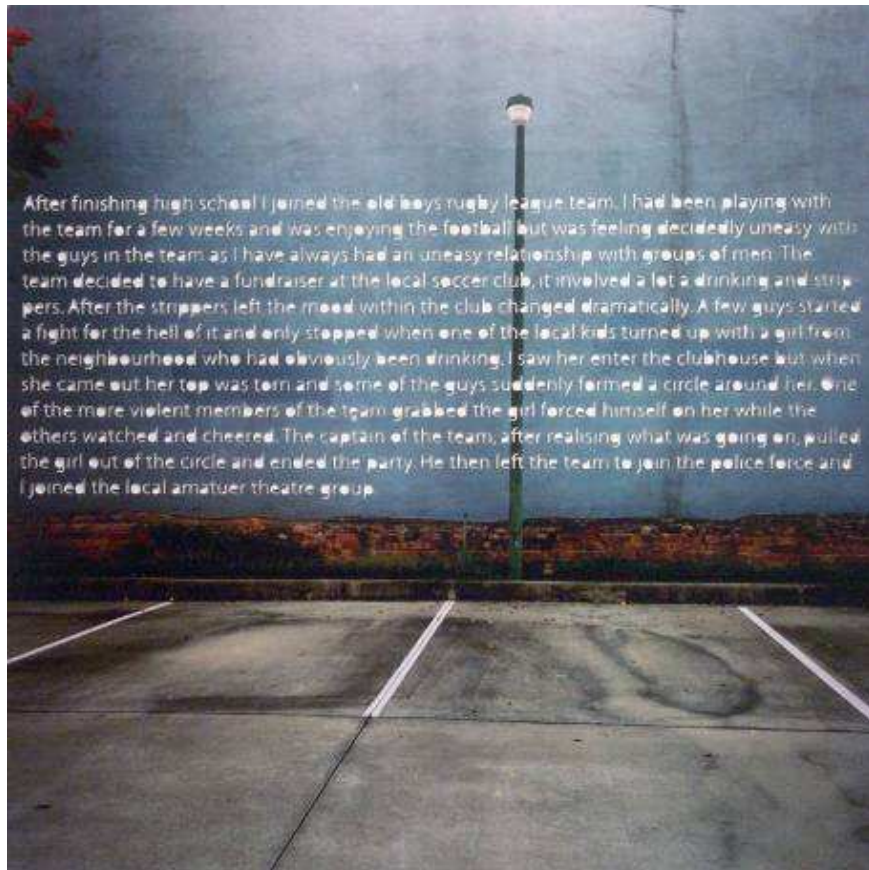
Themes and issues for discussion

- Personal, diaristic narratives
- The role of song lyrics in our lives. How we define ourselves through our tastes in music, our through our playlists or mix tapes
- The status of the photograph as a social document
- Everyone in our culture is an amateur photographer. We all take and keep photographs of ourselves and others
- The difference between family photos and art photos
- Relationship between personal photographs and personal memories as well as the relationship between diary entries and personal memories
- Positive and negative space
- Relationship between text and image
- Autumnal mood because the fallen letters refer to something spilled or lost
- Inability to read the text and the image simultaneously—in fact they battle one another
- The surface of the photograph is ruptured or torn
- The cutting is all done by hand. It is a violent gesture that may be likened to mutilation
- Emptying an image versus filling it

How is the work made?

The older images by Smith are based on photos taken with a 35mm camera while most of the recent works start with images taken with a medium format camera. Although Smith is trained as a photographer, he does not go out and take artful or deliberately composed images with the idea in mind of cutting a specific text into it. Instead he takes a casual approach to image-making that may be likened to the attitude of an amateur photographer: he takes a kind of “happy snap” where he is intuitive about wanting to capture a moment laden with personal meanings. The pictures Smith cuts texts into are sometimes ‘found images’ including those people have taken as family photos rather than art photos. They include family pictures from Smith's own childhood. For instance, *The Gardeners* features an image taken by someone else in his family during a trip to SeaWorld when Smith was about 10 years old.

In order to select an image to cut text into, Smith goes through his back catalogue of images, treating them as 'found objects' in a sense. These stories are childhood stories often relating to coming-of-age themes such as adolescent pastimes, friendships, and conflicts and the awakening of sexual interest. The letters are cut into the photograph by hand with a scalpel and the cut letters are retained as part of the art work. When the photographs are displayed on the wall, these letters are scattered on the floor below to reinforce the meaning of rupture, spillage, and loss. This also creates a quiet, reflective, autumnal quality – it is as if the photos have shed these texts, the letters falling away like autumn leaves.



Martin Smith
After finishing High School
 Lambda Print
 110 x 110 cm
 Courtesy and © of the artist.
 Photo: Martin Smith

KATIE MOORE

Katie Moore creates 'wooden' objects using various materials, none of them actual wood. Her sculptures have an inner core of plaster or foam, coated with a self-adhesive woodgrain vinyl product called Cover-it (also known as Con-tact). In common with post-minimalist practice, Moore's sculptures refer to everyday objects, use simple materials, adopt pared-down forms and rely on hand-crafting.

The imitation woodenness of Moore's sculptures is not sufficiently convincing to reduce the art work to a mere confidence trick. Instead, by divorcing the image of wood from its substance, and exploring this gap between surface and depth the artist examines one of sculpture's fundamental conventions, dating from the Renaissance—the doctrine of 'inner necessity'. (A sculptural convention, it dictates that the surface of the work should be an expression of its underlying structure. By contrast, Moore's sculpture articulates a deliberate separation between surface and core).

The work reveals some of the physical processes of its manufacture—including cutting, adhering, building, and laminating—but is equally concerned with narrative meanings engaged by representational sculpture. Many of these derive from European folk-tales. Moore's simple objects (staves, stones, snail shells, wooden crates) seem to be invested with the symbolic power and magical qualities of talismans.

Themes and issues for discussion

- Folk narrative
- Nostalgia and the passage of time
- *Trompe L'oeil*
- Material transformation
- *Mise-en-scene* or theatre set an assortment of objects or props around which a drama may unfold. The staves and stones suggest a journey that is over
- Inauthentic materials versus authentic ones. Substances are just what they are. Stone is no more authentic than concrete. And plaster is no less authentic than wood

How is the work made?

The artist makes three dimensional shapes out of foam or plaster and then covers them with a sticky vinyl printed with imitation woodgrain. For example in the three-dimensional 'wooden staves' that she has presented, she actually cast the shape of each staff by gradually syringing liquid plaster into a balloon and letting sections dry so that the accumulated weight of the plaster stretched out the balloon into a long form. Once it solidified, Moore covered all of it with fake woodgrained Con-tact or Cover-it (these are brand names for an adhesive vinyl product) and inverted it so that it looks like a staff (an old-fashioned walking stick, also a sign of power or authority in the Bible or in fairy tales). The stones are made in a similar way – they are also cast plaster covered with woodgrain-patterned adhesive vinyl.



Katie Moore
Crates (detail) 2007
Foam, self-adhesive vinyl, double-sided tape, plaster
Crates each 43 x 72 x 41 cm; snails each 2 x 2.5 x 2.5cm;
Installation dimensions variable
Photo: Carl Warner

JESS MACNEIL

Jess MacNeil's work is a large-scale video projection. The camera is in a fixed position, focusing on the steps of the Sydney Opera House. We see shadows of people moving up and down the steps and while they are figurative, they also have a strongly abstracted quality. The way the artist created the work was by filming the people walking up and down the steps and then digitally removing the human figures so that all that remains of them are their shadows. There is a soundtrack of the normal environmental noises (human voices and seagulls for instance) but it is very quiet and unobtrusive. In the work, the rigid parallel lines of the steps operate like an armature (much like the modernist grid) onto which a motif is hung. The work examines aesthetic ideas of positive and negative space as well as social meanings of absence and loss.

Themes and issues for discussion

- Positive and negative space / Presence and absence
- The individual vs. the group
- Mass movements of people through public space
- Life as illusion – immateriality, fleeting, transience, impermanence
- Ghosts, traces
- Geometric (step) is fixed, versus organic (shadows) that move. Steps have strong form while shadows are 'shape-shifting' and hence, formless
- Steps may be likened to a grid or visual anchor
- Loss and spillage communicated especially in the way the shadows run down the steps
- As a pattern, the movement of shadows acts as a visual metaphor for musical sounds over the steps, like a musical staff or register
- Tension between figuration and abstraction

How is the work made?

MacNeil films people walking up and down the steps of the Sydney Opera House from a fixed camera position. Using computer technology, she digitally removes the images of the people and all that remains is the stairs and the shadows. There are other discontinuities in the image however because wherever the artist removes as image of a person, she replaces their silhouette with the stone steps in light even though it may be shadow falling across the steps behind their body.



Jess MacNeil
Opera House steps December 2006
 Digital video looped 2 min 28 sec
 Courtesy the artist and Gallery Barry Keldouis
 © the artist

BRIELE HANSEN

Briele Hansen integrates video projections into different spatial environments, presenting brief actions and incidents that appear to occupy the same physical realm as the viewer. The spectator becomes a passive participant in the unfolding scene, one in which he or she often encounters the illusion of another human presence.

The artist's work in *Primavera, Untitled*, consists of a vertical DVD projection onto a low, queen-sized bed covered in white sheets. The silent video is looped to depict a simple repeated sequence. Slowly, a form seems to emerge under the sheet, as if from within the mattress. Gradually, the shape coalesces and we perceive a human figure that remains shrouded. The body turns ever so slowly, and sinks away again. The action is slowed down, as if to lay bare its every nuance. The face, which would individuate the figure, never breaches the surface of the sheet and we are left with the impression of having witnessed a ghost.

Hansen's installation engages themes of presence and absence, intimacy, loss and longing.

Themes and issues for discussion

- Absence, loss, longing
- Deception/illusion
- Ghosts
- The real and the represented (consider the wrinkles on the bed: some are real and others are a video projection)
- The idea of domestic space
- The work's poetic and meditative qualities
- How an ordinary event can become unsettling through re-framing

How is the work made?

Briele Hansen filmed this work in the same bed as what she is showing it on. She needed to do this to keep the ratios correct. It is important that the figure in the bed is life sized and that the video projection extends exactly to all four edges of the bed and not before or beyond these edges. Doing this ensures that there is a strong and puzzling illusion – we get an impression we are looking at a real three-dimensional figure in a bed. Hansen films the person underneath the sheet. All they do is turn over very slowly. When this video is projected back onto the empty bed there are real wrinkles in the real bed but the projection also includes wrinkles in the sheet within the film so at different times we can't be sure whether we are looking at actual wrinkles or illusory ones.



Briele Hansen *Untitled* 2003-04 DVD projection, queen bed, white sheets
dimensions variable Courtesy and © the artist Photo: Briele Hansen

Artists in MCA Mezzanine Galleries

JUSTINE KHAMARA

Justine Khamara's main work is titled *Bugaboo* and is a suspended installation that is made of cut and bent colour photographs that are assembled together to make up three-dimensional elements that portray a scene. It comprises three decapitated heads. The whole scene appears as the aftermath of a traumatic event or as something that would take place in a ghost realm.

When encountered from a distance the work appears to have an almost seamless surface and looks as if it could be a pop-up book illustration but as the viewer comes closer to the work, its surface seems to break apart as gaps and discontinuities emerge. From a distance the work is all façade but up close the façade starts to slip. A second work by Khamara looks like a pair of giant eyelashes on the wall. It comprises two side-by-side photo-based sculptures. When approached more closely, each eyelash turns out to be a photograph of a human arm that the artist has cut out and mounted.

Themes and issues for discussion

- The relationship between the whole and the fragment
- Storytelling/book illustration quality
- Trauma/tragedy
- The 'mask' in theatre and more precisely, the head of the Medusa in Greek myth. The mythic/folktale dimension of the work
- Surrealism
- Photography as a planar medium versus photography-in-the-round
- Distance and proximity
- Relationship between photography and sculpture

How is the work made?

Khamara used wet (film-based) photography using an Olympus SLR camera. But now the camera she uses is digital. It takes about 240 photographs to make one head.

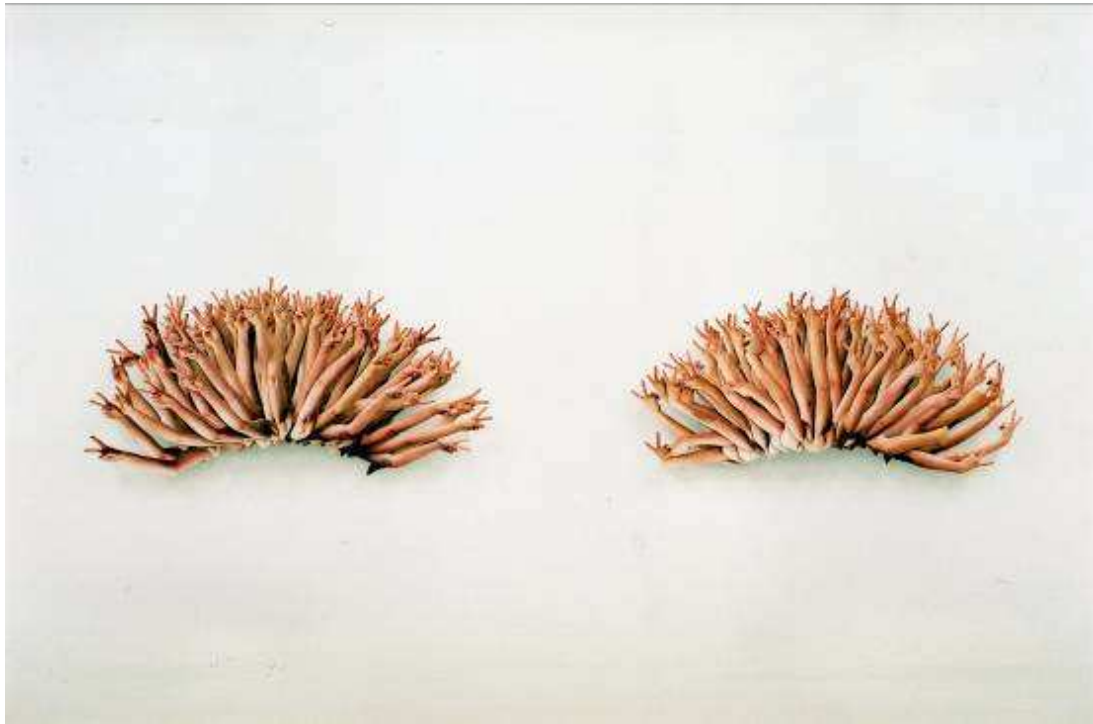
In Khamara's own words:

I develop my initial ideas in the studio through drawing and experimenting with materials, such as discarded photographs left over from previous projects. Once an idea has been developed I then make a model in order to establish the best way to realise the work. Often my early ideas change during this process as I contend with the limits and challenges of the materials I am working with, which for this project include photographs, adhesive tape and cardboard.

Before I start to take the photographs, I first have to decide what kind of shots and models are required, calculate how many photographs I will need for each work, and therefore how many sets to have printed. For one of the works in this project I decided to use my brother as a model who lives in the UK. I sent him detailed instructions and he took photos of himself accordingly (he did a great job!). Generally though, I take my own photographs, usually of friends and family members.

Once the photographs are taken, I then select and resize elements in Photoshop and prepare files for printing. The prints are then cut out and prepared for assembly. By far, most of my time creating a work is spent cutting out and preparing the photographic elements. This can take months as attention to detail is a critical aspect of my work.

When all of the photographic elements are prepared I can then set about assembling the works. For this project, two smaller sculptures will be constructed in the studio, while a third larger work will be assembled on site in the Project Gallery. This third work will be made out of specially crafted modular photographic components that slot together. The final shape and scale of this third piece will be determined by the way in which it interacts with the two smaller works in the gallery space.



Justine Khamara
Double V 2005
photographic prints, adhesive
30cm x 15cm
Courtesy and © the artist
Photo: Justine Khamara

HONOR FREEMAN

Honor Freeman works in slip-cast porcelain. She presents two still life arrangements of vessels and an installation of ceramic soaps and sponges. The still life arrangements look like ordinary household Tupperware containers (including beakers with lids etc): one of the two works feature decal (transfer) motifs of yellow roses; the other features an array of pastel coloured containers. A third installation by Freeman presents household 'sponges' and 'soaps' made of porcelain. The sponge sculptures were made by dipping real sponges in slip (liquid porcelain) and then firing them. During the firing, the sponge material burns up and leaves behind ceramic - like a kind of exoskeleton. Sponges, like porcelain vessels, are designed to hold and release liquid while soaps, by contrast, are worn down, destroyed or degraded by contact with water. This installation of sponges and soaps is a playful examination, and subversion, of the relationship between ceramic and liquid. Her work also focuses on the contrast between the hand-made and the mass-produced.

Themes and issues for discussion

- The art-historical genre of the 'still life,' see for example the paintings of Giorgio Morandi or the ceramics of Gwynn Hanssen Piggott
- Dichotomy in craft: beautiful vs. functional
- Women's post-war return to domestic duties and the value of cleanliness and thrift that was promoted to women by products like Tupperware
- Time passing and nostalgia
- The everyday (domestic objects)
- Trompe L'oeil (Def. 'deceives the eye')
- Hand made vs. mass-produced
- Liquid (slip) versus solid (fired porcelain)
- Watertight versus porous

How is the work made? Notes from the artist:

All work for this show is made from porcelain and is used made using a combination of slip casting and hand building techniques.

- Objects are either sourced or produced and plaster moulds (for slip casting) are made and allowed to dry out completely before casting from.
- Porcelain slip is made by adding a measured amount of water and deflocculant to dry clay - then blended and sieved many times over to get a smooth consistency (not too thick and not too watery) like cream.
- Powdered stains can be added in small increments to create a coloured clay body for slip casting (for example pastel coloured Tupperware)
- The slip is blended (trying not to get air bubbles in) each time before it is used and then sieved before being poured into the cavity of plaster mould. You leave it to stand for 5-15 minutes (depending on the thickness required and the weather). The slip is poured out, and a skin of clay is left on the interior of the mould (plaster being a thirsty material, it sucks the moisture from the slip that is in contact with the mould's surface). Once again, depending on the size of the piece being cast and the weather, the object will shrink as it begins to dry and pulls away from the plaster mould and is then removed.
- The cast is cleaned up and at this point is still at a fragile stage and could be recycled and reused.
- When the work is bone dry it is carefully sanded - it is still very fragile and brittle at this point.

- The work is bisque fired (900-1000 degrees Celsius) which takes approximately 8 hours depending on the size of the work and how wet it is (if the work is too wet and fired too fast it will explode in the kiln because the moisture can't escape from the clay body)
- The kiln needs to cool down (this takes 12 hours or so - depending on size of kiln and the pieces)
- The bisque ware clay is not vitrified at this point but can no longer be recycled and re-used - it's quite chalky.
- The work is further sanded and cleaned - or alternatively it is glazed
- The pieces return to the kiln once again to be fired - in this case to porcelain temperatures (1280-1300 degrees Celsius), the clay body becomes vitrified at this temperature. Again, the kiln takes at least 12 hours to cool down. The work if unglazed still needs further sanding - and in the case of the Tupperware with the floral pattern - they are fired once again to 800 degrees Celsius to fire on/attach the ceramic decals to make them permanent.

Porcelain Sponges and Towels:

- The sponges and towels have been soaked in porcelain slip and fired using the same processes as outlined above. The sponge and fabric burns out during the firing, and I am left with artefacts of dirt.



Honor Freeman
Durable, reliable, practical and serviceable 2006
 slipcast porcelain and ceramic decals
 dimensions variable
 Courtesy of the artist and Sabbia Gallery, Sydney
 Photo: Michal Klivanek
 © the artist

PATRICK DOHERTY

Depicting imaginative scenes, full of symbolic iconography, Patrick Doherty's narrative paintings are executed on large-scale, unstretched canvases. The disjuncture between one vignette and the next lends a hallucinatory quality to these works, which have the scale and vast narrative scope of epic literature; they appear to illustrate a tale of legendary events—part picaresque, part Gothic horror.

Like Hieronymus Bosch's triptych paintings *Haywain* (1485–1490) and *Garden of Earthly Delights* (c 1504), Doherty combines images of heaven and hell but he integrates them hierarchically within a single image.

Doherty's background as a street artist is apparent in the way these paintings incorporate graffiti art's large scale and shallow pictorial space. Like graffiti, the drawings that underpin the paintings have a freshness and immediacy that indicate they were laid down rapidly. However, his work lacks the slick and stylised signwriting-inspired graphics that aerosol enamel so readily lends itself to. Instead, Doherty's style is loose and freeform, and his lines are lyrical.

The looseness in Doherty's mark-making is matched by the looseness of his support. The canvases are pinned to the wall with a casual slackness, as if they resist the idea of a stretcher frame's constraint.

Themes and issues for discussion

- The whole versus the detail; Positive and negative space
- 'Finished' versus 'unfinished' (loose mark-making, raw edges and unpainted canvas).
- Instead of the painting becoming a transparent window onto the world, we are aware of it being 'cloth' and its strong material and object-like quality.
- Shallow pictorial space: a lot of foreground, motifs spread across the surface rather than recessed deeply in space
- High-raked picture plane, no horizon line, "overall-ness" in the treatment, no real centre in the narrative or in the composition.
- Potential associations with familiar non-art things – sheets, towels, awnings, truck canvases, banners, tarpaulin, domestic cloths.
- Storytelling motifs: circus elements, mythic beings
- Immersion in the epic scale, like reading or being in a fantastical universe.



Patrick Doherty *Good Dad (Don't Leave)* 2007 (detail, work in progress)
Oil, spray paint and acrylic on canvas

Courtesy the artist and Goddard de Fiddes Gallery, Perth Photograph: Tony Nathan

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Thanks to Christine Morrow, MCA Curator and Naomi Evans, MCA Curatorial Assistant.

PRIMAVERA 07
MCA Galleries Level 1 and 2
24 August – 4 November 2007

Major Partner



Supported by the Turnbull Foundation



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