

Sculpture Now!?!



Yarra Sculpture Gallery
27 August - 12 September 2010

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What is Sculpture Now!?! collaborative cross stitch with tea and cake? A man with three ears? Seven foxes in a shopping trolley? A floral bouquet immaculately constructed from roadkill? A carpet of dust and ash? A paper shelter? A glass radio ruminating on death and the afterlife? Anthropomorphic assemblages of opportunity shop clothes? A gaggle of robotic sentinels that adorn Melbourne's lane ways? Ceramic anime pets?

Sculpture Now!?! is intended to deliver a snapshot of some of the current thematic and conceptual influences that inform contemporary sculptural practice in Australia. The artists range from emerging to established with an emphasis on innovation and experimentation. The exhibition aspires to shed some light on the myriad of diverse trajectories in which sculptural practice is heading.

A prevalent theme that emerges within the artistic concerns in this exhibition is an examination of the human condition and our relationship with technology and nature. Stelarc investigates this on a physiological level producing appendages and extensions that explore the anatomies evolutionary potential. Within these alternate anatomical architectures, the body is positioned as an interface. This cyborgic body hovers on the interstice between actual and virtual realms, illustrating the changing character of our daily 'realities'.

By contrast Eliza-Jane Gilchrist explores these elements through the metaphoric and the humorous, alluding to something beyond the sum of its parts. Consciousness or lack thereof is insinuated through absence, a void that is only able to be understood and defined when contained by its parallel opposite - a signifying presence. These polarities are implied through anthropomorphic assemblages of opportunity shop clothes.

In the work of Karleena Mitchell and Petra Svoboda, traditional sculptural materials such as glass and ceramics are extended in innovative and unexpected directions. As Mitchell's seductive glass radio emits disembodied voices that ruminate on death and the afterlife, there is a sense that she is touching on some universal experience, of what it means to be human. By contrast Svoboda's ceramic anime influenced characters draw on a variety of cross cultural influences, utilising the vernacular of pop culture to reference Zen Buddhist mythology.

Another concurrent strand within this show is the utilisation of unique materials to address environmental concerns. This is exemplified through the cane toad skins of Linelle Stepto that depict native flora and fauna as a

response to globalisation and the destruction of the local. It is also seen in and the assemblages of Junky Projects, whose totemic figures adorn the laneways of Melbourne. These sentinels act as a warning against the perils of environmental degradation in the context of global warming and drastic environmental change. Rod McRae's *Operation Foxtrot* reinforces this trend with a reference to over population.

In Hannah Bertram's ephemeral site specific intervention, dust and ash are employed to embrace the complex poetics of transience. The conventions and lexicon of ornamentation are appropriated in order to examine the notion of value and worthlessness. While Bertram resists the monumentality and finality of modernist sculptural trends in favour of a dematerialised art object, Lucie Hallenstein's shelter is informed by the art historic conventions of minimalism. In this instance however, the geometric paper structure forms a protective sanctuary. Her intuitive methodology stands in direct opposition to the historical emphasis on seriality, linear stacking or other formal qualities. This strategy could read as a feminist intervention into the constructs of the reductive aesthetic.

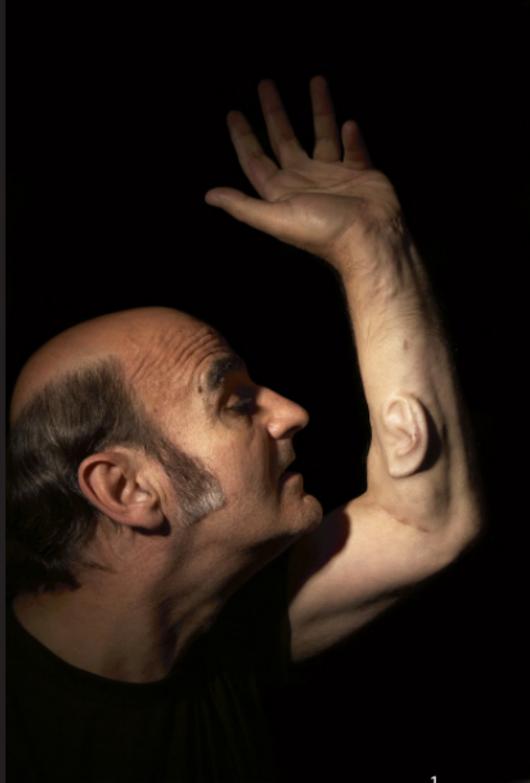
In Rayna Fahey and Lynda Roberts *Open Site Embroidery*, collaborative production processes examine the relationship between art and craft, site and website. In alignment with Rod McRae's *Operation Foxtrot*, the artists present open ended propositions where the audience completes the work. In this context a social organism is presented as a work of art. Concurrently, this methodology destabilizes the hierarchy between the artists and viewers as active participants and passive receptors. This move, of empowering the viewer with agency, also dismantles the mythology of artistic genius and singular authorship.

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Stelarc



1.

"An ear is being surgically constructed and cell grown on my arm. It is still a relief of an ear whose helix needs to be lifted. And a soft ear lobe grown with extracted adult stem-cells. Implanted electronics will internet enable the ear in any wifi hotspot. People in other places will be able to hear what the ear is listening to. The ear on arm becomes a publicly accessible, mobile acoustical organ." Stelarc.

1. Stelarc, *Ear On Arm*, London, Los Angeles, Melbourne, 2006 – ongoing.
Photographer Nina Sellars

2. Stelarc, *Ear On Arm*, London, Los Angeles, Melbourne, 2006 – ongoing.
Photographer Nina Sellars

Stelarc's central premise is the notion that the body is obsolete in a technological society. The artist's practise is therefore geared towards engineering an "alternate anatomical architecture."¹ Thus the human physiology is amplified, augmented and extended with appendages. These often manifest in the form of implants and exoskeletons that enable the body's evolutionary potential. Conversely, the outcome is destabilising and pervades a sense of uncertainty and imbalance, revealing the bodies limitations.

While this sculptural realisation resembles the relics of antiquity, is not the artistic intention to infer the work with classical notions and its related associations. The work is neither intended to be illustrative nor figurative, nor is it referencing in the post modern sense. Rather, its *raison d'être* is about generating and actualising an idea in materiality, that of a remote acoustical organ.

Stelarc's practise is non linear and constantly oscillates between the physical and virtual realm. He has used prosthetics, robotics, VR systems, the Internet and biotechnology to explore "alternate, intimate and involuntary interfaces with the body."²

His earlier work includes making 3 films of the inside of his body, amplifying body signals and 25 body suspensions with hooks into the skin. Some of his projects include the *Third Hand*, *Virtual Arm*, *Stomach Sculpture*, *Exoskeleton*, *Extended Arm*, *Prosthetic Head*, *Muscle Machine*, *Partial Head* and *Walking Head*. He also performs as his avatar from his Second Life site, exploring Second Life as a Second Skin. (AB)







Hannah Bertram

“To illuminate the possibility of an extraordinary ordinariness, and the preciousness of the incidental.”

In *Now They Are Gone, I Hold Them*, Bertram utilises the ephemeral materials of dust and ash to embrace the complex poetics of transience. Through its revelation and engagement with the processes of ornamentation and inevitable decay, this work questions the value of permanence and mortality. In the context of sculptural practise it resists the monumentalism of modernism in favour of the temporal, bringing to mind works such as Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, 1970.

Drawing on an extensive visual lexicon garnered from numerous natural sources and cultural histories, Bertram employs the signifiers of ornamentation. Evoking the whip lash lines of Art Nouveau, the repetitive patterning of William Morris or the irregular formations of the natural world, these curvilinear motifs form subtle interventions.

Absolved and decontextualized from their traditional purpose and function, that of adding supplementary value to their associated object, the decorative motifs are revoked of their 'objecthood.' They are instead transposed directly onto the gallery floor, a context that is elusive, immaterial and hence unattainable. As such these dematerialised, site specific interventions remove the art object from the cycles of production and exchange within commodity fetishism. A strategy employed by the concept artists of the 1960's.

Through a laborious production process, Bertram reaffirms the significance of labour value, a factor that is further substantiated by the works ephemeral nature.

Occupying a shifting territory between value and worthlessness, presence and absence, this spatial intervention examines the notion of what constitutes preciousness. Through the decoration of the banal and the incidental, Bertram imbues everyday environments with a ritualistic sanctity that is evocative of arts original use value; that of having a religious or sacred purpose. (AB)

3. Hannah Bertram, installation view, *An Ordinary Kind of Ornament*, ash collected from Victorian Bushfires and Ash collected from Man Mo temple Hong Kong, 2010, Hong Kong.



4.

Rod McRae

- 1) The first rule of Operation Foxtrot is that you do not talk about Operation Foxtrot.
- 2) 'Acquire' a shopping trolley for Fox transportation
- 3) Liberate Foxes from the context of the natural history museum
- 4) Establish the leader, he may answer to the name of 'Coriander.'
- 5) Insert tag team into an unlikely human context whereupon previous fox signification is altered.
- 6) Photograph
- 7) Repeat

Rod McRae removes the taxidermied specimen from museological conventions of display and unleashes *Operation Foxtrot*. Taking its point of departure from performance art where the audience completes the work, *Operation Foxtrot* is presented as an open ended proposition. By inserting the foxes into uncanny and unlikely social contexts, McRae's practise addresses overpopulation and the encroaching urban sprawl. (AB)

4. Rod McRae, *Operation Foxtrot*, seven mounted Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), steel shopping trolley, 2010
5. Linelle Stepto, *Colonise - Coastal Banksia*, cane toad skin, florist wire, 2009



5.

Linelle Stepto

Linelle Stepto is an artist and conservationist whose sculptural descriptions of iconic Australian flora and fauna present more than meets the eye. Immaculately rendered out of introduced species such as cane toad skin combined with florist wire, road kill is appropriated and incorporated as an artistic material.

More insidious than a Dutch Vanitas, the bouquets warn of the annihilation and extinction of Australian native genus by introduced colonial species. They could be a floral 'memento mori' for the environment, a reference to the encroaching threat of globalization to the local; the homogenised to the unique. For Stepto, these concerns are considered inextricably bound up within the formation of national identity and a socio-cultural sense of self.

Reconfigured for the purposes of environmentalist critique and socio-political commentary, these unexpected materials evoke a complex response that extends beyond the simplicity of their formal qualities. Despite the somewhat paradoxical and disconcerting nature of its material, it cannot be denied that *Colonise- Coastal Banksia* succeeds in addressing pertinent issues and eliciting debate. This is executed without didacticism but through the seductive power of artistic commitment and attention to detail. (AB)



6.

Petra Svoboda

Petra Svoboda creates fantasy worlds from ceramic materials and mixed media, constructing uncanny environments inspired by pop surrealism, animation, street art and fairytales. Svoboda's sculptures are made using a casting process that replicates the form of a soft plastic inflated object. This process allows for multiple reproductions while at the same time producing a hard surface that is glazed with metallic oxides. Svoboda draws on the connection between folklore and national identity, particularly in Japanese Culture and examines its relationship to traditional Shinto/Buddhist beliefs. Gokko-Neko (Make Believe Cat) and Gokko-Inu (Make Believe Dog) are part of an installation based on contemporary notions of Exoticism and the influence of Oriental Popular Culture on Australian society. The work examines these changing notions of the Exotic, as age-old definitions pertaining to concepts of imperialism are being redefined through the "soft power" mediums of animation, computer games, collectable toys, and related merchandise. These forms of entertainment are redefining childhood experience whilst simultaneously creating informed attitudes toward the Orient through the participation and active engagement that they precipitate³. (KM)

Karleena Mitchell

The Late News combines traditional glass casting techniques with modern technology to become an example of innovative contemporary glass art. The cast glass radio is illuminated by LED lights emanating a warmth that is accompanied by a soundtrack of voices making the object communicative. The work was inspired by the artists search for answers on the topic of death. The 1960's glass radio is inspired by Mitchell's memories of being gathered around a radio in a time when it was the sole provider of news and entertainment, the "pulsing heart of the house"⁴. The glass radio is a metaphor for the fragility of life, the transient voices reminiscent of moments in time. On the soundtrack Mitchell has interviewed dozens of public figures about their views on death and the afterlife. Creating the work became a cathartic experience for Mitchell and the people she interviewed, and what is heard while listening to *The Late News* is moving, surprising, sad and deeply personal. Mitchell has lived in many places across the world, and through her life has encountered many religious influences, *The Late News* presents people from an extensive range of cultural and religious backgrounds, and while their beliefs are varied, the differences eventually become blurred in this work and the common thread of humanity shines through. (KM)

6. Petra Svoboda, *Gokku-Neko (Make Believe Cat)*, cast ceramic, metallic glaze, 2010

7. Karleena Mitchell, *The Late News*, Cast glass, original 1960's radio front, LED lights, audio sound system, 2010

7.





Rayna Fahey & Lynda Roberts

8.

Joseph Beuys noted that “Every human being is an artist, a freedom being, called to participate in transforming and reshaping the conditions, thinking and structures that shape and inform our lives.”⁵ As part of Sculpture Now!?! Rayna Fahey and Lynda Roberts are participating in a global collaborative craft project the “Embroidered Digital Commons,” as part of the Open Source Embroidery Project.

The artists and audience will embroider a definition of the term ‘SITE,’ while exploring the relationship between an actual site and a virtual web site. “SITE: location, both as in the fact of being somewhere and also as in the answer to the question of “where,” that “somewhere” is; hence, situation.”⁶ As such a website as an address on the Internet always implies a relation of desire between hosts and visitors. “In this way, a site can be both located as well as liminal, real as well as potential.”⁷

This work functions as a disruption of the sanctity of the white cube gallery construct, resisting finished objects and production processes. *SITE* will remain instead a work in progress, evolving over the duration of the show. At times it will remain dormant. At other times it will resemble a hive of activity, inhabited by children, teacups and social detris; Staged in synthesis with the operations of daily life.

For cultural theorist Nicholas Borriaud relational aesthetics are defined as, “a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure from the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space.”⁸ *SITE* exemplifies this concern for enabling the relationship between spectators, of function over form. (AB)



9.

Junky Projects

Junky Projects is an artist that has been involved in the street art and graffiti scene for over ten years. Junky began as an aerosol painter and is now a street sculpture artist, an evolution that has occurred through creating innovative ways for his work to stand out. As an artist, Junky “didn’t want to sell people more junk to add to the world’s junk⁹.” Junky creates his sculptures using recycled and upcycled materials. Upcycling is a term used to describe finding new uses for the waste products and off-cuts that are come from manufacturing. Inspired by a long artistic tradition of using found objects, Junky sources most of his material from junk on the streets and creates artwork that is returned to the streets.

While Junky Projects continues to practice as a street artist, he has recently begun exhibiting the Junky Projects in galleries, a move which allows him to target specific audiences and encourage thought on consumerism and consumption. The personalities and idiosyncrasies of the Junky Projects characters are formed by the objects they are made from, Junky intends for them to “act as a constant reminder to all who pass by that one day the garbage and junk we throw away may come to haunt us everywhere we turn¹⁰.” (KM)

8. Rayna Fahey (Radical Cross Stitch) & Lynda Roberts (Public Assembly), *SITE*, installation, 2010

9. Junky Projects, street installation view, found objects, 2010



10.



11.

Eliza-Jane Gilchrist

Inside Story refers to the way we experience the world subjectively and imaginatively through metaphors and narratives. People often describe feelings and experiences in metaphors that relate to the physical body: head in the clouds; a light bulb going off above a person's head signalling an idea; or having a backbone pertaining to having moral fibre and strength.¹¹ Ideas are interrelated with our physicality and our language reflects that physicality.

Inside Story is assembled through a process of bricolage from found clothing and objects as Gilchrist encounters them. Each item retains an element of humanity, similar to a skin that has been left behind by an insect shedding itself in order to grow. Empty clothes become shells which Gilchrist re-animates. *Inside Story* is constructed intuitively. Each component is laden with symbolism, most noticeably the empty spaces where we find something missing. (KM)



13.

Lucie Hallenstein

It can be said that many innovative contemporary artists who began their practice as a painter or a drawer have eventually been drawn into sculpture. Often this transition occurs while studying art at a tertiary level, when one is exposed to a range of possibilities for constructing art, Lucie Hallenstein is an example of such an artist.

Through illustration, Hallenstein would let her mind take over and create geometrical patterns. Having evolved from pencil on paper, Hallenstein now folds paper itself in a structured way, through processes of randomness, similar to doodling on a piece of paper. The work *Paper Shelter* is created specifically for a gallery space, intended to be a sanctuary where viewers can step inside and shelter themselves from the outside world. (KM)

11. & 12. Eliza-Jane Gilchrist, *Inside Story*, mixed media, 2010

13. Lucie Hallenstein, *Paper Shelter*, paper, 2010

Footnotes:

1. Stelarc, conversation with the artist, 2010.
2. Ibid
3. Text adapted from artist statement by Petra Svoboda
4. Quote from Karleena Mitchell, artist statement 2010
5. Qtd in Stachelhaus, Heiner. Joseph Beuys. New York, Abbeyville press: 1991.p 61
6. Facilitated by Ele Carpenter: <http://www.open-source-embroidery.org.uk/EDC.htm>.
7. Ele Carpenter, Open Source Embroidery.
8. Bourriaud, Nickolas. Relational Aesthetics. Dijon France, Les presses du reel: 2002. p 113
9. Junky Projects, conversation with the artist, 2010
10. Quoted from Junky Projects, artist statement, 2010
11. Sourced from Eliza-Jane Gilchrist, artist statement, 2010

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