



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Kerry Smith *Traveling Beyond the Homeland* 2008, birdcage with nylon ribbons, bedsprings

Gemma Smith *Way* 2011, acrylic on board. Courtesy the artist & Sarah Cottier Gallery, Sydney

Nike Savvas *Sliding Ladder: Truncated Icosahedron #1* 2010 wood, wool. Courtesy the artist & BREENSPACE, Sydney, photo: Jamie North

Lisa Jones *Playing Host* 2006-12 (detail), wood, felt, thread, silicone, steel. Courtesy of the artist & Conny Dietzschold Gallery Sydney/Cologne

Elizabeth Gower *Prismatics* 2006-07, paper on canvas. Courtesy the artist & Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

Lesley Giovanelli *Turquoise Cloud Chair* 2012 (detail) polystyrene, polyester wadding, wool, dye, pins

All images courtesy the artist unless otherwise stated

THE BAKER'S DOZEN

VIVIENNE BINNS
BONITA BUB
DEBRA DAWES
LYNNE EASTAWAY
LESLEY GIOVANELLI
ELIZABETH GOWER
LORNA GREAR
LISA JONES
ELIZABETH PULIE
NIKE SAVVAS
GEMMA SMITH
KERRY SMITH
SAMANTHA WHITTINGHAM

CURATED BY LORNA GREAR

The Baker's Dozen invites the viewer into a domestic setting that plays with arrangement, display and re-arrangement. The aesthetic is contradictory, the minimal is juxtaposed against the busy, and the optical illusion is transferred to three dimensions.

Experimenting in abstraction and with form, these thirteen artists draw attention to the processes and materials used as they work into areas of beauty, domesticity and the hand-made. Here, the curatorial approach celebrates informal mentoring and peer-to-peer relationships, embodying the tangential connections that span the established, mid and early career artists.

With practices overlapping Neo Geo, Formalism and Post Pop these outstanding Australian artists allow the personal and spontaneous to intersect with political, social and aesthetic ideologies.

LG 2012



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

Debra Dawes *Got a hankering (green)* 2010, oil on canvas. Courtesy the artist & Gallery Barry Keldoutis, Sydney

Elizabeth Pulie *Board Study (Angles)* 2011, acrylic, oil stick, medium on board. Courtesy the artist & Sarah Cottier Gallery, Sydney

Lorna Grear *Woodmix* 2012, paper, inkjet prints, ply, collage on plywood



THE BAKER'S DOZEN

Some scholars suggest that the suspicion of sensory joy in contemporary art harks back much further than Conceptual art's critiques, and can rather be found at the roots of Western aesthetics in Platonic thought. As art historian Jacqueline Lichtenstein puts it, following Plato's regime, 'Only what is insipid, odourless and colourless may be said to be true, beautiful and good'.ⁱ The association of austere aesthetics and moral seriousness found powerful expression in early modernism; it was perhaps most vehemently captured in Austrian architect Adolf Loos' infamous pronouncement that ornament is a crime.ⁱⁱ This stance was fundamental to some of the ideological rationales of Modernism, which asserted that radically reinventing form could radically reinvent reality, that the unadorned aesthetics of mass production could deliver a better, fairer society.

The relation between Modernism, aesthetic restraint and social progressiveness is complicated however by certain historical antecedents, not least the Arts and Crafts movement, in which decoration and ornamentation were wielded as defences against the dehumanising effects of capitalism. Often ornate and sumptuous in colour and detail, the objects produced under the auspices of Arts and Crafts were dignified by harbouring within them the duration of the artist's effort; they affirmed the inherent nobility of manual labour. The intricate, hand-rendered wallpaper designs of William Morris, for instance, were seen to stand 'against corporate labour...and for individual self-determination', against disembodiment in all its forms and for 'the potential of the human body at work'.ⁱⁱⁱ On account of these qualities, craft was then, and remains, according to craft historian Bruce Metcalf, 'an opposition', 'a social movement'. Metcalf argues that despite 'a gradual breakdown' in hardened attitudes,

the conceptualist bent of contemporary art remains 'utterly blind' to craft's important attributes. These include precisely those qualities that give craft its oppositional potential, namely its relationship to the hand-made, its arduous and demanding technique, and its associations with the domestic sphere.^{iv}

We know that these conflicting narratives of the making of the Modern have been thoroughly problematised. And yet, many of their propositions remain unresolved, still resonating in the contemporary in generative ways. In this exhibition, these histories form a rich context that the artists draw on and work through with well-honed, often craft-based (or craft-like) techniques. What is evident is the pleasure of thoroughly testing, even mastering, a material, the joy of playful experimentation with form, the fun in transposing material from one context to another and discovering unexpected connections, and the delight of sensory stimulation. Also evident is a holistic approach — like that of the early modernists— that does not separate out the art object from the designed world. Another strong underlying current in the exhibition is feminist re-readings of the distinctions that hardened after the fluidity of early modernism, namely the battle lines between craft and art, art and design, beauty and political critique, pleasure and purpose. It is noteworthy that all the artists here are women, whose practice has necessarily traversed the complex insights of their feminist forebears. Moreover, the exhibition has provided for an intergeneration dialogue on these feminist insights, given the broad range of career and life experience represented.

Contemporary art's re-valorisation of Modernism was identified a while back by international curators and critics; for

some, this trend marks (along with other developments), the passing of the postmodern period and the beginning of something else, be it 'the contemporary', 'supermodernity', or 'the altermodern'^v (Interestingly, the cultural cachet of early modernism has also escalated in the world of high-end design, with evidence of a 'tectonic shift in the tastes of the super-rich, away from English and French 18th century antiques, long the international lingua franca of grand domestic furnishing, and toward early to mid 20th century design'.) As such critics assert, to be aware of history and actively dialogue with its narratives does not mean to be stuck in the past, reiterating well-tried – or arguably anachronistic – positions. Brecht once warned, 'Don't start from the good old things but the bad new ones'^{vi}, but this is not a rejection of historical self-reflexivity as much as an incitement to not venerate tradition for its own sake. To assert the appeal of rhythm and rhyme in contemporary poetry, for example, as the so-called New Formalists have done, is not necessarily conservative and nostalgic. To assert the special value of the hand-rendered object, for example, is not to return to discourses of originality and authenticity, nor even to necessarily engage with 21st century political debates around sustainability and down-sizing. It may rather be an affirmation of the endless creative opportunities that are 'at hand', opportunities that allow artists to 'de-program in order to re-program' the world. Such gestures may suggest 'that there are other possible usages for techniques, tools and spaces at our disposition', and together may help to 'permanently affirm... the transitory, circumstantial nature of the institutions and the rules that govern individual or collective behaviour', as Bourriaud puts it.^{vii}

The tantalising colour, pattern and texture of 'The Baker's Dozen' is an invitation to engage

aesthetically – meaning both conceptually and sensuously – with the still live debates about the relationship between craft and art, art and design, beauty and critique. In this exhibition, the artists appear to propose that the pleasures of making and form, as well as the pleasures of looking, are integral to considering the social purposes of art.

Jacqueline Millner

Dr Jacqueline Millner teaches theory at Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney, and writes widely on contemporary art. Her latest book is 'Conceptual Beauty: Perspectives on Australian contemporary art' (Artspace: 2010).

NOTES

- i. Jacqueline Lichtenstein, 'On Platonic Cosmetics', in Bill Beckley (ed.), *Uncontrollable Beauty*, New York: Allworth Press, 1998, 87.
- ii. Adolf Loos, 'Ornament and crime', 1908
- iii. Bruce Metcalf, 'Contemporary craft: a brief overview', 1999, in Jean Johnson (ed.), *Exploring Contemporary Craft: History, theory and critical writing*, Coach House Books, 2002, 16-17
- iv. *Ibid*, 22.
- v. For example Julian Stallabrass, Terry Smith, Marc Augé, and Nicholas Bourriaud. In Australia, an early identification of this trend was Linda Michael's Adelaide Biennale of 2006, 21st Century Modern.
- vi. Martin Filler, 'London's Apocalypse Then and Now', *The New York Review of Books*, LVIII:20, 44, January 2012.
- vii. Brechtian maxim, quoted by Walter Benjamin, Walter Benjamin, 'Understanding Brecht', London: Verso, 2003, xi
- viii. Nicolas Bourriaud in conversation with Bartholomew Ryan on Tate Triennial, 'The Altermodern': <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-opinion/conversations/2009-03-17/altermodern-a-conversation-with-nicolas-bourriaud/>



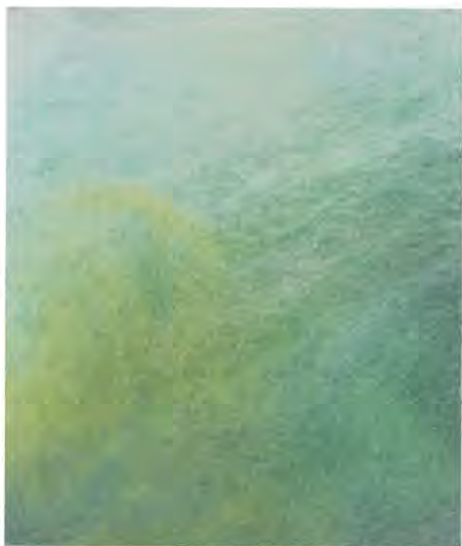
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

Bonita Bub *Hovercraft* 2010, ply, acrylic, hinges

Lynne Eastaway *Large Black, Grey, White I Screen Series*, 2008-2011, acrylic gouache on laminated cotton duck

Samantha Whittingham *Temptation* 2011, cast bronze

Vivienne Binns *Fifth Translation of Nylon Mat* 2006, acrylic on canvas. Courtesy the artist & Sutton Gallery, Melbourne



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UTS
GALLERY



LIST OF WORKS

VIVIENNE BINNS

1. *From David's Jumper mark II* 2007-08, acrylic on canvas, 152.5x183.8cm

2. *Fifth Translation of Nylon Mat* 2006 acrylic on canvas, 200x260cm

BONITA BUB

3. *Hovercraft* 2010
ply, acrylic, hinges, dimensions variable

DEBRA DAWES

4. *Dare two* 2010
oil on canvas, 85x85cm

5. *Got a hankering (green)* 2010
oil on canvas, 260x180cm

LYNNE EASTAWAY

6. *Unpacked #2* 2008-11
acrylic, gouache on laminated linen,
mixed media, dimensions variable

LESLEY GIOVANELLI

7. *Turquoise Cloud Chair* 2012
polystyrene, polyester wadding, wool,
dye, pins, 120x100x120cm

ELIZABETH GOWER

8. *Prismatics* 2006-07
paper on canvas, each work 100x100cm

LORNA GREAR

9. *Woodmix* 2012
paper, inkjet prints, ply, collage on plywood
60x70cm

10. *Whitepop*, 2012
oil, acrylic, paper on plywood 60x70cm

11. *Giftwrap*, 2012
oil, acrylic, ply on plywood 60x70cm

LISA JONES

12. *Playing Host* 2006-12
wood, felt, thread, silicone,
steel, dimensions variable

13. *Pocket Series* 2011
acrylic, 70x50x50cm

ELIZABETH PULIE

14. *Foyer (I)* 2011
acrylic, oil stick, medium on linen, 120x100cm

15. *Foyer (II)* 2011
acrylic, oil stick, medium on linen, 120x100cm

16. *Board Study (Angles)* 2011
acrylic, oil stick, medium on board, 21x30cm

17. *Board Study (Silver)* 2011
acrylic and oil stick on board, 21x30cm

NIKE SAVVAS

18. *Sliding Ladder: Truncated Icosahedron #1*
2010, wood, wool, 130x130x130cm

19. *Sliding Ladder: Mandala* 2010
wood, wool, 220cm diameter

GEMMA SMITH

20. *Chessboard Painting 12* 2012
acrylic on wooden chessboard, 38x38cm

21. *Tether Tangle* 2010
acrylic on board, 140x120cm

KERRY SMITH

22. *Homeland Security* 2006-12
furniture and utilitarian objects, wool,
blanket fabric, 1500x300x300cm

23. *Traveling Beyond the Homeland* 2008
birdcage, nylon ribbons, springs, 40x38x22cm

SAMANTHA WHITTINGHAM

24. *Table and Chairs* 2012
formply, 80x70x300cm

25. *Temptation* 2011
cast bronze, 53x45x46cm