

The Biography of Things

Australian Centre
for Contemporary Art

4 December 2015 - 21 February 2016

Education Kit



Introduction and Curatorial Rationale

Co-curated by Juliana Engberg, Annika Kristensen and Hannah Mathews, *The Biography of Things* is an exhibition that brings together 11 Australian and international artists. *The Biography of Things* explores the way that artists have recently been examining objects, archives and collections to reveal narratives that are connected to and entwined with people, culture and histories from across the globe. Through examining the collections and archives of our museums and cultural institutions, it is possible to learn about and discover not only what has been documented and conserved over time, but also what has been concealed and forgotten.

The museum collectable is not only interesting to artists, but something that curators have been preoccupied with for some time. In an Artlink (1999) article titled *Artists and Collections: a working partnership*, Rachel Kent discusses the history of artists working with collections and archives to produce artwork. “Historically, artists have drawn inspiration from museums and their diverse collections – archaeological, ethnographic, medical, botanical and zoological”. Sketching from museum natural history displays and classical sculpture has always been a staple in the first few years of art school, but in addition, many contemporary artists and curators are looking to museum collections “for both inspiration and actual source material”.

Andy Warhol’s 1970 exhibition *Raid the Icebox* at the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, was a landmark exhibition in which the artist used design objects and artworks from the collection to create unconventional exhibition displays. This exhibition was the first of its kind and changed the landscape of art exhibition

practices. In 1990, Joseph Kosuth’s exhibition *The Play of the Unmentionable* at the Brooklyn Museum, “set a kind of trend for artists to rummage in store-rooms and cross pollinate in exhibition gestures of new museology that unpack histories, questioned orthodoxies, exposed prejudices and told new stories” (Engberg, 2015). Artist Grayson Perry curated an exhibited in 2012 at the British Museum called *Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman*, where he explored the power of objects through their placements in museums, and as religious, ritual or desired artefacts. The purpose of this exhibition was also to show uncelebrated objects that were not usually on display.

In this vein, ACCA’s exhibition *The Biography of Things* looks at objects and collections through time and across cultures. It questions the authority of these objects, including architecture, natural ephemera and human-made items. It examines how objects from around the world have been repurposed for placement in collections, and their classification through a Western lens. Like people and other animate beings, objects have histories, lives and stories that are carried with them intrinsically, but also which humans attach to them. Using existing histories and bringing research into practice, the artists in *The Biography of Things* are interested in documenting, unearthing, and exposing these encounters and relationships.

Key Exhibition Themes

Methods of display

Key to the production of any exhibition, including those involving collections, archives and objects, is the question of display. When producing an exhibition, the curator or artist decides to present the objects and artworks in certain ways. There are many ways to display objects and artworks in exhibitions: on top of plinths, in glass or Perspex cabinets or vitrines, drilled into or hung on walls, placed on the floor, hung from the ceiling... the list is endless. A number of the works in *The Biography of Things* look at display devices used to exhibit artworks and objects in museums and galleries, and furthermore what these display devices and methods convey or communicate to viewers.

Collections and archiving

The Biography of Things brings together a varied range of artists whose practices look at collections and archives. As a result, the works being exhibited construct and decipher meaning from these collections and the stories and histories that they hold and tell. The fact that *The Biography of Things* is exhibited at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA) is interesting and in a sense peculiar, because ACCA is a Kunsthalle, a Swiss-German model of museum, which doesn't acquire artworks and does not hold a collection.

A global perspective on art

Many of the artworks in *The Biography of Things* “look beyond the Museum, and connected collections to things in the world that also have stories to tell”, (Engberg,



2015) and many of these things are artworks and artefacts from different cultures and parts of the world. For a long time many of the museums in the Western world were highly Eurocentric, that is, focused on collecting and exhibiting art and objects from Europe, Britain and other parts of the Western world.

More recently there has been a shift amongst museums and galleries to encompass and represent a more balanced and inclusive view of art and culture, with the display and collection of works and objects from Eastern and non-Western cultures. ACCA's exhibition of *The Biography of Things* brings into focus people, artefacts, and cultures that have not always been in the spotlight, and have perhaps been excluded

Ilit Azoulay

Shifting Degrees of Certainty, 2014

85 inkjet prints, framed

dimensions variable

Tony Podesta Collection, Washington

Born 1972 in Jaffa, Israel

Lives and works in Tel Aviv, Israel

Ilit Azoulay is the ultimate artist-detective, unearthing concealed narratives following a rigorous line of inquiry, whilst examining the ways in which our understanding of history can be constructed or manipulated. Playing with a web of interweaving facts, memories and rumours, *Shifting Degrees of Certainty* forms a network of narratives for the audience to discover, connect, and interpret (Yawitz, 2015). As you follow each thread of the network, the connections become less reliable, but the objects demand attention for further investigation.

In her practice Azoulay “connects with other professionals whose work is to unearth and permanently attach meaning to objects” (Yawitz, 2015), such as collectors, archive managers or natural scientists. Whilst completing a residency at KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin, Azoulay collected and photographed objects from the KW building and other sites in Berlin, Weimar, Kulmain, Regensburg, and Brandenburg. The network of photographs in her work *Shifting Degrees of Certainty* are often architectural fragments; usually ornamental and practical additions such as corners and details (Yawitz, 2015).

Shifting Degrees of Certainty comprises 85 objects collected and photographed by Azoulay using a technique similar to scanning, montaged to allow a three-



dimensional point of view into a single digital image. Sound files accompany each photograph, making information on the process of its collection and data available to the viewer. The audio guide offers insight into Azoulay’s research process, whilst uncovering the historical and personal details of the objects and sites. Azoulay shares the stories about each photograph in the hope that the audience questions and investigates the subject matter, as she did herself. Many of the photographs are linked to one another, and the audio guide encourages you to follow these narratives to uncover more information through the numbering system across the work. The white frames displaying each photograph are uncommon shapes that appear to have been designed and constructed around the objects. These shapes are arranged carefully together, like a jigsaw strategically pieced together to connect the photographs. The photographs act as a method of documentation and the arrangement challenges the viewer to connect the jigsaw as pieces to a larger story.

Camille Henrot

Grosse Fatigue, 2013

video (colour, sound)

13 mins

Courtesy the artist; Silex Films; and kamel mennour, Paris

Born 1978 in Paris, France

Lives and works in New York

French artist Camille Henrot is best known for her videos and animated films, but uses a diverse range of mediums including sculpture, drawing and photography. Henrot's practice has a keen interest in a wide range of disciplines, and her work often involves in depth research into subjects such as literature, mythology, cinema, anthropology, religion and history. She is fascinated by the relationship between science and faith, and recently Henrot's practice has explored ideas of the "other", often highlighting and examining art forms, objects, histories and myths from non-Western cultures.

Henrot's extensive project, *Grosse Fatigue*, exhibited as a part of *The Biography of Things*, consists of a projected video in an enclosed gallery. The walls of the gallery are painted Google blue, and the floor is carpeted in the same distinctive colour. *Grosse Fatigue* is a portrait of the universe and everything in it, and the screen appears as a computer monitor with browser windows and files opening, overlapping and closing constantly across the screen. These windows and the footage and images within them tell "the story of the creation of the universe, and the things in it, through items collected in the Smithsonian Institutions, collided with ephemera, films and images gathered and made by Henrot" (Engberg, 2015).

Methods of collecting and archiving feature prominently in Henrot's dense and interweaving narrative of videos and images. As Engberg wrote, "systems of analogue storage – drawers,



high density archive shelving, catalogue boxes, envelopes, glass plates and files..." all appear in *Grosse Fatigue*, highlighting the changes that have occurred in recent times between analogue and digital cataloguing. Accompanying this visual mash-up of imagery is a spoken word piece, a kind of creation poem that Camille Henrot wrote in collaboration with American poet, Jacob Bromberg. Spoken word is said to be the ancestor of Hip Hop, and this influence is definitely clear when watching *Grosse Fatigue*. The steady beat of a drum keeps rhythm alongside the words, and poem, almost-musical, very much keeps the viewer grounded and immersed in the space.

Whilst making *Grosse Fatigue*, Camille Henrot researched Creationist myths from across the globe, including those from Sioux, Navajo, Inuit and Shino cultures, and the spoken word piece weaves these creationist stories and mythologies into one narrative. These multiple and conflicting stories surrounding the beginnings of the universe create a collective reading of our world and its histories, cultures and inhabitants.

Paul Sietsema

Figure 3, 2008

16 mm film, black-and-white and colour, silent

16 mins

Courtesy the artist and Matthew Marks Gallery, New York

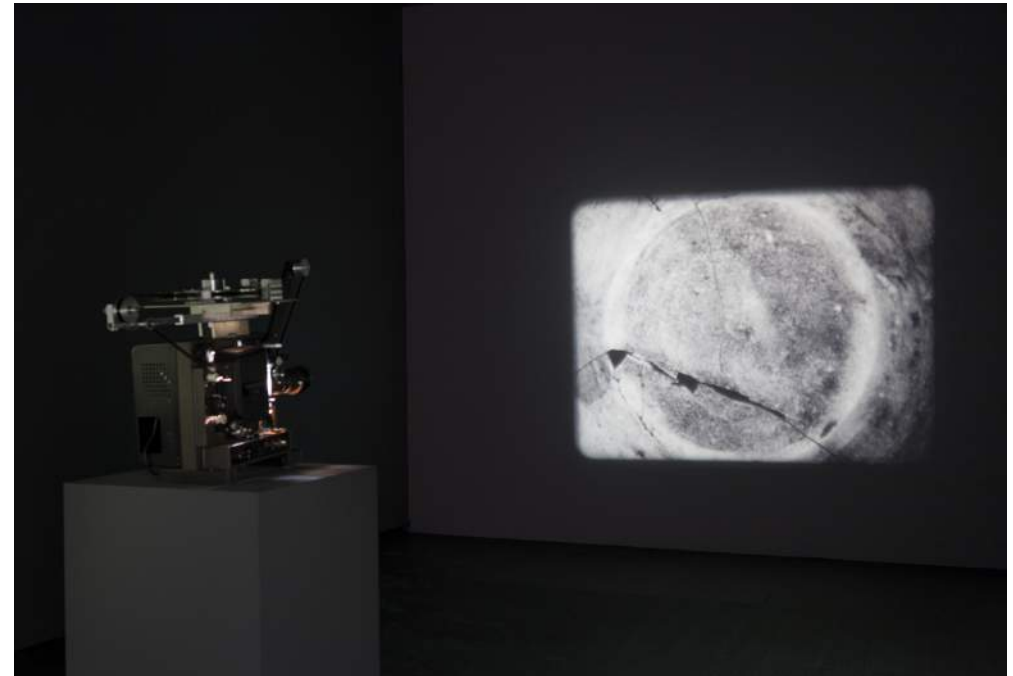
Born 1968 in Los Angeles, USA

Lives and works in Los Angeles

Paul Sietsema works in a range of different mediums, including drawing, sculpture, photography and film to reflect on our collective understandings of culture and history. Material processes, for example sculpting and drawing, are central to Sietsema's practice and his work often involves 'recreating ethnographic objects and artefacts' in order to uncover their original context and history.

Figure 3, which is exhibited as a part of *The Biography of Things*, is a silent 16 mm film that is in parts abstract but also figurative, and moves between black, white and colour. As a starting point for the film, Sietsema collected mostly black and white images from books on anthropology and ethnology. These images depicted Indigenous artefacts and objects from various cultures and times. Sietsema then used these images as references to reconstruct the artefacts and objects, using materials such as plaster, gum Arabic (a waxy, sap-like material obtained from certain types of tree) and aluminium powder.

With these materials, Sietsema conducted 'rigorous material investigations and techniques of reassembly' (DiQuinzo, 2015), and trialed certain materials and techniques in order to recreate the objects as faithfully as possible. During this



process he paid close attention to the objects' visual properties, their surfaces and textures. He then filmed these fabricated objects using an Arriflex 16 mm camera, one after the other, against black backgrounds. Documentary filmmakers used this type of camera during the mid-twentieth century.

Whilst filming these sculptures and objects, Sietsema experimented with environmental factors such as lighting and colour, observing how they affected the appearance of the objects on film. He was really interested in making these objects appear tactile and sensory on screen. The filming in *Figure 3* moves between being quite abstract and painterly, with close-ups of the objects and artefacts, as well as more distant figurative segments of footage. As a result time and duration are central in this work. The artefacts that Sietsema has chosen for this film are from places in the world that have been colonised and this sense of time relates directly to history.

Kristen Pieroth

Conservation Piece, 2010

30 jars, liquid from boiled newspapers

dimensions variable, shelf 30 x 270 cm

Courtesy the artist and Galleria Franco Noero, Torino

Born 1970 in Offenbach, Germany

Lives and works in Berlin, Germany

Since the mid-1990s, Pieroth has exhibited widely across Europe and North America. She draws unexpected connections between otherwise contrasting things, playfully and thoughtfully creating room for new interpretations of everyday items. Through using found materials, she illustrates a tension between literal and abstract stories embedded in these objects.

Conservation Piece is part of a larger series called *Untitled (Essences)* (2010-ongoing), in which Pieroth literally distils various collections of printed documents into liquid essence to preserve the words written on the paper. In *Conservation Piece*, thirty collected jars containing a yellowed, cloudy liquid appear randomly arranged on a shelf. Pieroth boiled down daily editions of *The New York Times* for the month of September 2010, and stored each edition in a different jar.

The *New York Times* was established in 1851 and is America's second highest-circulating newspaper, written in a politically independent and analytical style. The jars are labelled with the day and date of the edition, as it would appear on the newspaper's masthead, and are not arranged chronologically, but more like a pile of rummaged newspapers (Mathews, 2015). The colours and remnants of the



newspapers in the jars vary, although each edition was boiled for the same amount of time, in the same volume of water. The Sunday editions of the paper were the most voluminous, appearing as the darkest colour.

By boiling and reducing *The New York Times* to its essences in *Conservation Piece*, Pieroth comments on the controlled nature of contemporary media, and the decline of print media, whilst preserving a history of media that is disappearing. Pieroth has described her approach as an investigation into “the relevance of media and a critique of it as such” (Mathews, 2015), stating she was interested in media as a system of power, with content carefully selected by editors.

Walid Raad

Preface to the Fifth Edition, 2014

archival inkjet prints

12 plates, each: 42 x 33 cm

Courtesy the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

Born 1967 in Chbanieh, Lebanon

Lives and works in New York, USA and Beirut, Lebanon

Working across photography, video, sculpture, and performance, with a career spanning 25 years, Raad's experiences of growing up in the midst of civil war in Lebanon have significantly influenced his practice. Between 1989-2004, Raad worked under the name *The Atlas Group*, producing fictional archival material that related to real life events in Lebanon. His practice has extended more broadly to the Middle East, with interest in the visual arts within the Arab world.

Raad's work highlights the problematic nature of how Islamic Art has been portrayed in the Western world. His project titled *Scratching on things I could disavow* (2007-ongoing) explores Islamic, modern and contemporary art in the Arab world (Sfeir-Semler Gallery, 2014). Raad spent two years exploring the Louvre's newly established *Département des Arts de l'Islam* in Paris, and began examining the recent emergence of art fairs, biennales, museums and galleries in the Arab world to house art—alongside the “geopolitical, economic, and military conflicts that have consumed the region” (MoMA, 2015).

Preface to the Fifth Edition presents the viewer with relocated objects that have been isolated from their background and presented on white pages. The series of twelve



prints are displayed in the gallery for *The Biography of Things*, as a grid format in white frames with annotations that resemble marks from curators or conservators. The objects appear dissected, analysed and documented, re-represented, removed and objectified from their original purposes and places. Raad's series of annotated images in *Preface to the Fifth Edition* explore the labyrinth of styles and traditions found in Islamic Art, and how these artefacts now have a Western narrative grown out of colonial history (Lista, 2015). Many of these items are utensils, and in their traditional place would have served a functional purpose. The goods found in *Preface to the Fifth Edition* were those often traded from the Middle East, fetishised and displayed in luxurious private European settings.

Nicholas Mangan

Crocodiles Move Fast Out of Water, 2012

HD video, colour, sound

3:52 mins

Courtesy the artist; Sutton Gallery, Melbourne; Hopkinson Mossman, Auckland; and LABOR, Mexico

Born 1979 in Geelong, Australia

Lives and works in Melbourne, Australia

Nicholas Mangan draws on history and science in his consideration of colonialism, consumption, global economies and politics, whilst exploring how objects can both conceal and reveal narratives. His practice is multi-disciplinary, extending across video, sculpture, drawing and installation.

Mangan describes his work as a process of “pulling things apart in an attempt to understand them, prying open certain narrative and materials to generate new readings” (Mangan, 2015). This is one of the hallmarks of his work, as Justin Clemens (2015) observes, he sometimes quite literally burrows into the ground on which we walk. With an often archaeological approach, he excavates and documents artefacts that are witnesses of a deep fusion of economics, geology and mythology.

Archaeological, geological and mythological themes collide in Mangan’s video work *Crocodiles Move Fast Out of Water*, featured in *The Biography of Things*. Comprised of a montage of images, Mangan’s quirky video follows the image of a crocodile from Charles de Gaulle airport out into the streets of Paris. As the story continues,



Mangan “reflects upon the establishment by the French government of a museum dedicated to exposing forms of counterfeit merchandise, those which allegedly damage the integrity of ‘real brands’” (Clemens, 2015). Described as representing the enemies of the French state, the story also links to the disappearance of three stone crocodiles from the *Triomphe de la République* (1889) at the Place de la Nation in Paris. “An entire compromised history of colonialism, collaboration, and control unfolds in the video’s brief space” (Clemens, 2015). Darting and interweaving fact and fiction, *Crocodiles Move Fast Out of Water* is an eccentric and engaging exploration of many themes.

Brook Andrew

Harvest, 2015

Victorian redgum, carbonised Victorian redgum, glass, brass, neon

150 x 406.5 x 65.5 cm. Neon 400 x 60 cm

Collection of the artist

Courtesy of the artist and Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne

Born 1970 in Sydney, Australia

Lives and works in Melbourne, Australia

Brook Andrew is an Australian artist who explores issues of race, history and power. Working across a variety of media, Andrew is interested in archival material and museum collections with attention to the acquisition and interpretation of objects across time. His work *Harvest* in *The Biography of Things* focuses on institutional methods of display.

Harvest is a sculpture, vitrine and miniature museum combined, with many sides to its form and purpose, “gathering and displaying objects from the collections of the institutions in which it is exhibited” (Muller, 2015). *Harvest* stands tall like a crystal palace, the legs of the vitrine resembling burnt and sooty stalactites, like the remnants of a bushfire, though sturdy and striking. When previously exhibited at the Ian Potter Museum of Art, the contents of the vitrine included objects culled from University of Melbourne collections, such as a native cat skull, a French anthropological text book, records of numbers of slaves transported from the coast of West Africa, and even a Dugong foetus. These dissimilar objects represent the “limitless abundance of war’s material history” (Muller, 2015), as well as principles of the acquisition and display of these objects.



Harvest is empty in *The Biography of Things*, which is interesting because ACCA, as a kunsthalle, is not a museum and has no collection. As the artist comments, “I am very drawn to the empty sculpture...the action of it being empty records and exhibits the multiplicity of its past and future biography of objects” (Andrew, 2015). The vitrine becomes the main focus, forcing the viewer to study the sculpture itself, and imagine what was previously contained and the memories that are captive inside. Constructed from Victorian redgum, cut glass and brass, *Harvest* showcases its material and form.

A rectangular neon dangles high above the vitrine, a light that has become signature to Andrew’s works, glowing and reflecting on the glass. *Harvest* challenges the viewer to consider why certain objects from are displayed in institutions at a height behind glass, to be remembered, while others are hidden away, ignored and forgotten. Known for his investigation of dominant Western narratives, *Harvest* could also be commenting on the absence and unknown history of indigenous Australia.

Aurélien Froment

Tombeau Idéal de Ferdinand Cheval, 2014

90 framed archival pigment prints

52.3 x 64.1 x 2.5 cm and 40.5 x 50.2 x 2.5 cm

Courtesy the artist and Marcelle Alix, Paris

Born 1976 in Angers, France

Lives and works in Dublin, Ireland

French artist Aurélien Froment's practice is multi-disciplinary, incorporating photographs, videos, performances, installations and publications. Conceptual and playful, Froment is interested in how we look at and decipher images. Interpretation and the relationship between language and image is the core of Froment's work, and his works often reveal that interpretation is subjective, never fixed.

Froment's work in *The Biography of Things* is titled *Tombeau Idéal de Ferdinand Cheval*, which translates to the *Ideal Tomb of Ferdinand Cheval* in English. The work was made in 2014 and is an installation of black and white photographs taken at the *Palais Idéal du facteur Cheval*. This unusual and fantastical palace is located in the village of Hauterives in southeast France, and was built by hand by Ferdinand Cheval, a rural postman. As the title of the work suggests, Cheval built this palace in the hope that it would be his tomb, although his wishes never came true. Self-taught, Cheval spent 33 years from 1879 building this wondrous building from stones that he collected on his rounds as a postman. He only left his hometown once in his lifetime, yet the palace appears to be influenced by different, more exotic cultures. Cheval collected and was inspired by nature, postcards and illustrated magazines. The resulting piece of architecture is unlike any other, and is considered an 'outsider' artwork, which artists have admired and been inspired by for more than a century.



Froment's *Tombeau Idéal de Ferdinand Cheval* presents 90 photographic portraits of architectural details of the palace that when hung together, form a fragmented whole. These photographs capture the sculptural details of the building, such as 'a nest of serpents' and 'the curvature of a staircase' (Kristensen, 2015), and in doing so allows the viewer to observe its intricate elements of construction. The palace itself is highly imaginative, decorative and reminiscent of temples in parts of Southeast Asia. By focusing on small details of the building's exterior, Froment isolates elements of Cheval's design, removing their architectural surroundings. This highlights Cheval's varied influences and interests. It is also interesting that Froment has chosen to use the medium of photography to document the palace, as it was photographs that originally inspired Ferdinand Cheval to create the *Palais Idéal du facteur Cheval*.

Narelle Jubelin

Case No: T961301, 1998

marine plywood laminated with stainless steel, silver framed cotton thread on silk mesh petit point, silver gelatin photograph, black ink on vegetal paper, stainless steel cutlery, silver cutlery

dimensions variable

Private Collection, Sydney

Born 1960 in Sydney, Australia

Lives and works in Madrid, Spain

Narelle Jubelin is an Australian artist based in Spain, and has a practice that is heavily grounded in research. For some time her work has focused on the journeys travelled by objects and images across distances and time. Jubelin often uses found and ready-made objects in her works, in order to explore “colonialism, commerce and ideas of cultural exchange” (Tunncliffe, 2015).

Jubelin’s work in *The Biography of Things* is titled *Case No: T961301*, and consists of two circular tables with cut out centres, suspended triangularly from the ceiling by steel cords. The surfaces of these tables are stainless steel, and there are a number of different objects placed on top of them including different sets of cutlery, typed transcripts, photographs, and framed petit point embroideries.

There are vast narratives that underlie *Case No: T961301*. Stainless steel was developed in the early 20th Century simultaneously in Sheffield, England, as well as Germany and the USA. In Sheffield stainless steel was discovered “during experiments to find a corrosion-resistant metal alloy for manufacturing guns” (Tunncliffe, 2015). The transcripts in Jubelin’s installation relate to the ‘Ploughshares Four’ court case, in which four female activists Joanna



Wilson, Lotta Kronlid, Angela Zelter and Andrea Needham, under the collective name the Ploughmans Four, were convicted for breaking into Hawker Siddeley’s Lancaster plant near Preston, England, and defacing and damaging a Harrier aircraft that was intended to attack East Timor. The women used everyday objects and tools including cutlery to attack the plane, and they were completely open about their attack on the aircraft, to the extent that they ‘left a video in the cockpit explaining their motivation.’ The group’s justification was that they were preventing genocide, and this defence was finally upheld, and the women acquitted.

Jubelin’s work was originally made for an exhibition at the Tate Liverpool Gallery called *ART-TRANSPENNINE* that looked at the Transpennine region of England in which Preston and Liverpool are located. The tiny embroideries that are presented alongside the cutlery and transcripts depict the view of the Tate & Lyle sugar stores, the company that founded the Tate galleries. After the Ploughmans Four court case, it was revealed that a common instrument of torture used on the East Timorese was cutlery. Jubelin’s practice always connects objects and images with narratives of commerce and power, as well as tracing stories across time and place, and this work is no exception.

Rosalind Nashashibi and Lucy Skaer

Flash in the Metropolitan, 2006

16 mm film, colour, silent

4 mins

Courtesy the artists and Murray Guy, New York

Rosalind Nashashibi

Born 1973 in Croydon, England

Lives and works in London, England

Lucy Skaer

Born 1975 in Cambridge, England

Lives and works in Glasgow, Scotland and London, England

Rosalind Nashashibi and Lucy Skaer have been collaborating and making work together since 2005, however both have individual practices as well. Together they make films and installations that look at the way that images are made, and the act of viewing or looking. Their work often focuses on the way that time, representation and knowledge affects images and objects.

Nashashibi and Skaer's work *Flash in the Metropolitan* that is included in ACCA's exhibition *The Biography of Things* is a silent 16 mm colour film, and was filmed at night in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The film duration is 3 minutes and 25 seconds in which Nashashibi and Skaer shine a torch intermittently on different artefacts and objects from the museum's collection. Other than these flashes of light, the projected image is dark. In the three and a half minute film Nashashibi and Skaer focus on artefacts from the Near Eastern, African and Oceanic collections.



By the simple act of flashing a torchlight onto these items, the artists alter the way we view objects in a museum environment which is designed for audiences to contemplate and take time to consider the collections on display. With only a flash of light we barely catch a glimpse of the artefacts, and they therefore appear “estranged from their original context and function” (Sharp, 2015). The objects are strange and ghostly on film, re-animated under the bursts of light. Sharp notes that observing and catching these sculptures outside of museum-sanctioned hours, almost gives them a power beyond what they are, inert statues. Our imaginations are sparked wondering whether these artefacts come to life when the museum lights are turned off and the doors are locked.

Curriculum Links & Activities

VCE Art

Unit 1

Area of Study 1: Art and meaning

Walid Raad's cultural background and experiences significantly influence his art practice. Analyse, interpret and discuss how these have influenced his artmaking by applying the Personal Framework and Formal Framework in the discussion. Research and explore some of Raad's other works, including his work under the name *The Atlas Group*, where he relates his engagement with Islamic Art with his exploration of the Louvre's Islamic Art department.

Brook Andrew has a growing personal archive which inform and are used in his installations, a past artwork database, and texts about his work. Using the Formal and Personal Frameworks explore the relationship between Andrew's work, his life and experiences. What visual evidence supports this reading? Has Andrew used a specific process or practice in creating the artwork that may reflect his personal philosophy and ideas?

Unit 3

Area of Study 1: Interpreting art

In an article on *e-flux conversations*, author Morgan Quaintance criticised Camille Henrot's work saying "...Grosse Fatigue displayed a troubling and dated tendency. It treated non-white bodies as anthropological curiosities, as examples of the exotic, otherworldly or primitive against which whiteness as rational, modern, cerebral and desirable could be constructed, measured and defined." Discuss this statement and compare *Grosse Fatigue* with an artwork portrayed as 'exotic' or 'primitive' produced before 1970 using the Analytical Frameworks.



Camille Henrot's work *Grosse Fatigue* explores creationist myths and making sense of the universe. Focusing on the Contemporary Framework, discuss the title and presentation of this work as a computer desktop in reference to methods of accessing and acquiring information.

Many of the artworks in *The Biography of Things* explore museum displays and collections. As a class browse an institution featured in the Google Cultural Institute online (For example, The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York). Discuss and debate as a class the artefacts you notice on display in these institutions. What is selected? How are they displayed?

Walid Raad's work explores functional Islamic objects that were removed from their original contexts, often fetised by Westerners and placed in luxurious settings. Is it wrong for these items to be displayed in Western institutions in this nature? Discuss and debate as a class.

In an interview with *Sleek Magazine*, Camille Henrot said, "The whole idea of what is true and what is not is being challenged by the accumulation of information. The experience of the Internet is the experience of excess and it is also an experience of envy and jealousy". Research other artists who have explored how technology has influenced human lives, and compare their approaches to this theme using the Analytical Frameworks.

VCE Studio Arts

Unit 1

Area of Study 1: Developing art ideas

Ferdinand Cheval's *Palais Ideal du facteur Cheval* is considered a masterpiece of naive 'outsider' art, which often illustrates unconventional ideas or elaborate fantasy worlds. Research other outsider artists as sources of inspiration, and explore how they communicated their ideas.

Area of Study 2: Materials and techniques

Rummage through an op shop and investigate an unusual found object. Research the object. Where has it come from? What is its purpose? How is it used? Photograph your object different angles and perspectives. Manipulate these photographs in some way (Eg. collage, photomontage, digital editing), to create a new meaning, purpose or narrative.

Area of Study 3: Interpretation of art ideas and use of materials and techniques

Compare and contrast Walid Raad and Paul Sietsema's approaches to using cultural artefacts in their works for *The Biography of Things*. How have these artefacts been represented in their works? What materials, media and techniques were used?

Unit 3

Area of Study 3: Professional art practices and styles

Many of the artists in *The Biography of Things* explore outsider objects and artworks from Non-Western cultures. Explore how Narelle Jubelin has uncovered and constructed narratives from the items and objects displayed in *Case No: T961301*, and analyse how she has connected these narratives through visual language.



Harvest by Brook Andrew was displayed earlier in 2015 at the Ian Potter Museum of Art, where it contained objects from the University of Melbourne collection. *Harvest* is displayed empty in *The Biography of Things*. How do these different approaches in display change the meaning, messages and interpretation of the work? Discuss why you believe the artist has made this decision.

Ilit Azoulay's work *Shifting Degrees of Certainty* allows the viewer to approach and investigate the artwork in their own way, through mapping a pathway and story. Explore this approach to this artwork. Discuss how the contemporary design and arrangement of the work assists audience experience and engagement.

VCE Visual Communication Design

Unit 1

Area of Study 1: Drawing as a means of communication

Made with Victorian redgum, cut glass and brass, *Harvest* by Brook Andrew showcases both material and form. Study the design features of the vitrine and complete a series of drawings from different perspectives with consideration of proportion and scale. Observe the structure, textures and finishes of the vitrine and render your drawings accordingly.

Area of Study 2: Design elements and design principles

Narelle Jubelin's work displays design of cutlery and how design is related to national identity. Study a country with distinct design features, and analyse a range of designs (communication, industrial, environmental) from this country using the elements and principles. Present this analysis visually, through an informative poster or annotated in your folio.

Collect examples of visual communication designs produced by ACCA promoting the exhibitions, including advertising, signage, book covers, pamphlets and the website. Highlight key characteristics of the designs, and describe the dominant elements and principles and how they communicate a message to the audience.

Unit 3

Area of Study 1: Analysis and practice in context

Redesign one of ACCA's existing communication designs to promote an exhibition. This could be an advertisement, signage, book cover, pamphlet or part of the website. Analyse how the existing example has used design elements and principles and consider what improvements could be made to create a more visually appealing communication design.



Victorian Curriculum 7-10

Visual Arts

Explore and Express Ideas

Ilit Azoulay uses photography as a method of documentation, but also montages some of the imagery in *Shifting Degrees of Certainty*, using a similar technique to scanning, to make the objects and environments appear more three-dimensional. Document an object from home or your own collection and manipulate these images in some way. Experiment with scanning and overlapping objects through adjusting the brightness and contrast on a photocopier. Develop a theme or story through overlapping the work.

Aurélien Froment isolated different pieces of the *Palais Ideal du facteur Cheval* to give these individual objects new meanings. Reflect on your own collection of objects at home and take portraits of these objects. Annotate these images in your folio exploring their histories and stories, and analyse their aesthetic features using the art elements and principles.

Visual Arts Practices

Nashashibi and Skaer flash a torch over artefacts for the work *Flash in the Metropolitan*, meaning the audience has restricted time to view these artefacts. Arrange an object as you would for still life, set up a tripod and an SLR camera, and set a long shutter speed. After you push the shutter button move a torch over your object. You may choose to focus on one area or move the torch around the whole object. Preview your images and experiment with longer and shorter shutter speeds, then compare the impact of light and shutter speed in the photographs in your folio.

Present and Perform

The filming in Sietsema's *Figure 3* moves between being quite abstract and painterly with close-ups of the objects and artefacts. Find an object from home with various textual details. Document this object by photographing these details from a range of angles and perspectives. Using digital media, adjust the colours and tone in the images to create something more abstract. Choose one photograph or present as a series for a final piece.

Respond and Interpret

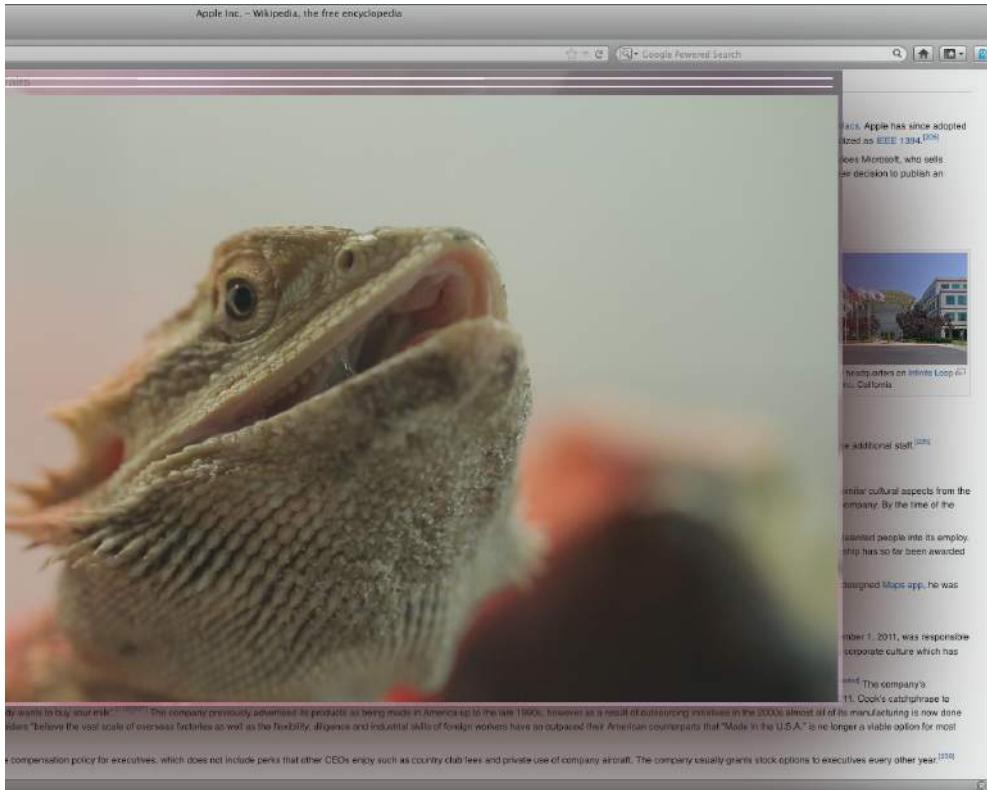
Intercultural, Ethical capability

Walid Raad's work examines the problematic representation of Islamic Art in the Western world. Examine how Islamic Art has been represented in the Western world throughout collections and institutions. Comment on the history of Islamic Art and the affect of Western interpretations of artworks and artefacts on Islamic culture.

Visual Communication Design

Visual Communication Design Practices

The artworks exhibited in *The Biography of Things* focus on objects, whether they have been uncovered, investigated or studied. Find an object at home that has a specific purpose and complete a series of observational drawings to represent the form, materials and surface textures of the object. Change the design of the object in some way through visualisation sketches to change the purpose of the product. Present both series of drawings to a small group of peers for critique and discuss how you repurposed the object.



Humanities

History

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia

Camille Henrot's work *Gross Fatigue* binds creationist myths from different cultures to create a super myth about the beginning of the universe. Work in groups to explore multiple cultures and their supernatural explanations for human existence. Identify the common elements and differences between the stories of creation between these different societies. Present your findings interactively, through an artwork, speech or performance.

Media Arts

Explore and Represent Ideas

Camille Henrot and Nicholas Mangan's artworks are accompanied by voices that narrate the work and maintain pace. These works are also constructed from a variety of imagery and footage. Construct a short narrative based around an everyday object or place with consideration of composition, time, movement and sound. Select and edit footage captured on camera to edit into a sequence. Apply narration, sounds or tracks that match the sequence's pace, rhythm and style.

Respond and Interpret

Kirsten Pieroth boiled daily editions of *The New York Times* for her work *Conservation Piece*. *The New York Times* is America's second highest-circulating newspaper, written in a politically independent and analytical style. Choose a news story from *The New York Times*, and find the same story from another media source. Explain how different technical and symbolic elements are used in these media sources to engage audiences and influence personal perceptions.

Music

Respond and Interpret

Accompanying the mash-up of imagery in Henrot's *Grosse Fatigue* is a spoken word piece. Spoken word is said to be the ancestor of Hip Hop. Listen to *Grosse Fatigue* and identify some of the music elements that shape the sound, such as rhythm and structure. Discuss Henrot's choice of spoken word, and how this affects the audience's experience of the work. Identify any social, historical or cultural contexts that could have influenced this decision.

Victorian Curriculum F-6

Visual Arts

Respond and Interpret

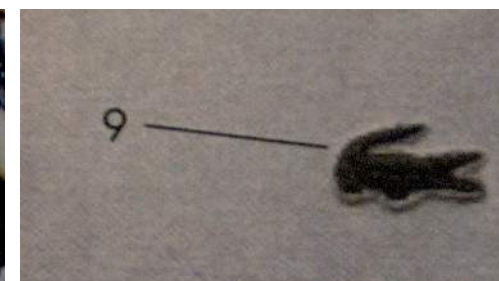
Nicholas Mangan's work cleverly tells the story of a crocodile through the streets of Paris. Through video, he interweaves fact with fiction to create an eccentric and playful narrative. Collaboratively generate a collection of names of objects, locations, humans and animals with a collection of descriptive words mixed together. Draw four words at random from a hat and create a poem using these words. Present the poems visually by creating a classroom display.

In small groups discuss the subject matter of Kirsten Pieroth's *Conservation Piece*. What can you see in the work? How is it arranged? What does it look like? Share your ideas, and discuss the different interpretations within your group.

Discuss your own objects and collections. Do you have your own personal collection? Bring an object from your own collection from home to school and discuss the history of the object, the purpose, and where the object has come from. How do you display this object at home? Do you hide it away? Do you arrange it with other objects from your collection?

Visual Arts Practices

Aurélien Froment's work *Tombeau Idéal de Ferdinand Cheval* follows the story of a postman who collected stones on his postal rounds to create *Palais Idéal du facteur Cheval*. He created something incredible out of something from his everyday life. For one week collect an item that can be found within your everyday routine (E.g. your walk to school). At the end of the week create an artwork using these everyday items in combination with other art materials. The artwork could be a sculpture, collage, digital or mixed media piece.



As a starting point for his film *Figure 3*, Paul Sietsema collected images from books and used these images as references to reconstruct artefacts. Browse a museum collection using sites such as the Google Cultural Institute (<https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/>), to explore a culture of interest to you. Study the design features and reconstruct one of the artefacts in the museum collection using materials like modelling clay and plaster.

Explore and Express Ideas

Look at how the artworks in *The Biography of Things* are displayed in ACCA's galleries. Discuss why you think they are displayed in that way. How would you display the artworks or redesign the exhibition? For your next project at school think about how you could create a unique display of work for the classroom or the school grounds.

Glossary

Anthropology – the study of human kind. Can include human societies, cultures, evolution.

Archaeology - the study of human history and prehistory through the excavation of sites and the analysis of artefacts and other physical remains.

Colonialism – control by one power over a dependent area or people.

Counterfeit – to imitate something. Counterfeit products are often produced with the intent to take advantage of the superior value of the imitated product.

Ethnography – the scientific description of peoples and cultures with their customs, habits, and mutual differences.

Kunsthalle – A Swiss-German term. Translated from German into ‘Exhibition Hall,’ Kunsthalls play an important role in the public art scene as institutions for presenting temporary art exhibitions.

Natural history - the research and study of organisms including animals, fungi and plants in their environment.

Outsider art - Art created by artists with no connection to the art world. These artists are often described as ‘self-taught’ or ‘naïve’.

Vitrine – a glass display case.

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Visiting ACCA

ACCA's FREE education programs are available for Primary, Secondary and Tertiary groups between 10am - 4pm from Monday to Friday.

Maximum 25 students per group for THINK and MAKE programs.

Bookings are required for both guided and self-guided School and Tertiary groups.

10am - 5pm Tuesday – Friday
12pm – 5pm Weekends & Public Holidays
(except Good Friday & Christmas Day)
Monday by appointment

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