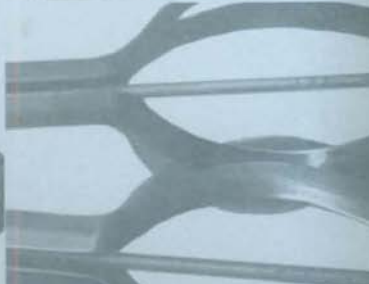
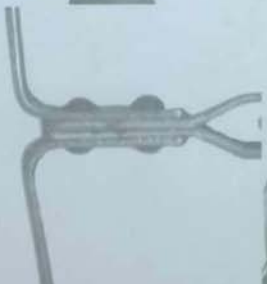




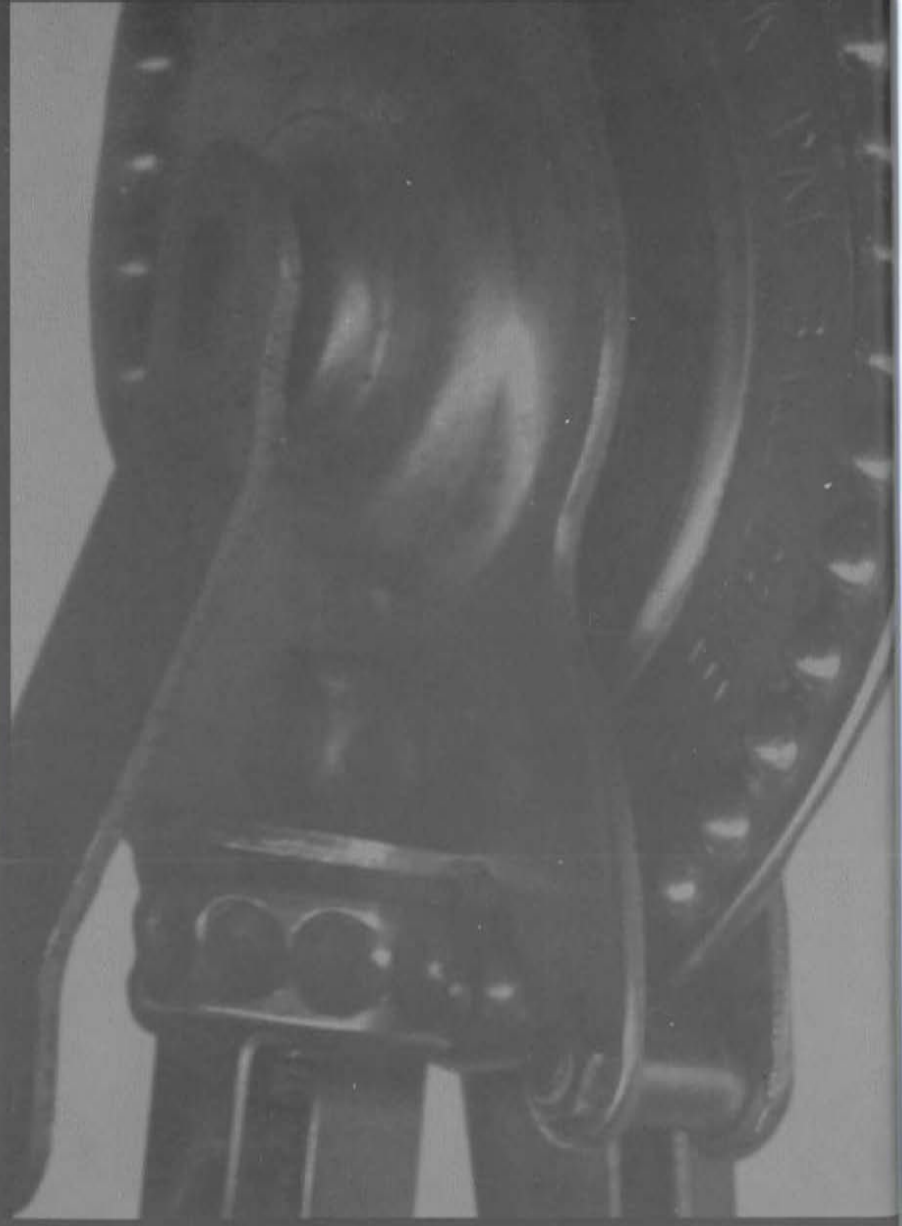
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1995



The collectAble Eggbeater







**Elizabeth Gower**

**Ruth Hadlow**

**Penelope Lee**

**Anna Phillips**

**Piki Verschueren**

**Guan Wei**

# FOR e word

fronted with “that will be \$10, they’re collectable now you know”. Well of course I could not buy it and I have not bought one since, although a few have turned up in the strange bumpy plastic bags that regularly appear on my front doorstep. Once the word is out, it seems the collector of ephemeral and easily cast off objects is welcomed by friends and acquaintances who find it too hard to throw things in the rubbish bin or welcome the idea of a stop before the St Vincent de Paul bin. Odd teacups and saucers and the inescapable piles of cast off clothes of course, but also cardboard boxes of every variety come my way. The big plan is for an Ephemera Museum in years to come, never mind that I can not sit in my studio without the sporadic cascade of cereal, toothpaste and Turkish delight boxes tumbling down. These objects are important.

**Heather B. Swann, 1995**

**T**hese objects are important. In curating this exhibition we looked for artists who find inspiration in the realm of the ordinary. Whether these artists are using actual objects or representing them, either literally or obliquely, the mundane is the starting point for their work. By seeking out and recontextualising these objects the artists are suggesting the importance of the every-day moment in the larger scheme of things. As the cross-over from private to public occurs, the domestic becomes a sphere worthy of consideration and elaboration. The place where we live.

**Heather B. Swann and Mary Scott, 1995**



Art aND the evEryday

In this exhibition all the artists have drawn inspiration from domestic objects of everyday use such as zippers, plates, tupperware containers etc., in many cases directly incorporating such objects into their artworks. In doing so, they treat the domestic as a legitimate area of artistic investigation, revealing the aesthetic nature of the prosaic.

If we examine the history of Western art, we find that the attitude of artists towards the domestic has varied considerably. Generally speaking, until the late nineteenth century, the domestic was not regarded as an arena worthy of art. Indeed, it was considered as the antithesis of art, whose role was to elevate the recipient above the mundane ordinariness of everyday existence into a higher, transcendent realm of the spirit.

Up until the Renaissance period, the subject matter of art consisted mainly of either religious and mythological themes or portraits of important personages since most art was commissioned either by the Church or Royalty. As the system of patronage under which artists had worked began to decline during the seventeenth century, secular subjects increasingly came to be dealt with by artists but even here, the domestic rarely featured. The one notable exception to this relative invisibility of the domestic realm was the Dutch painting of the seventeenth century where the portrayal of domestic scenes and the depiction of everyday objects in the form of still lives emerged as important genres. The predominance of such themes in Dutch and Flemish art was a consequence of the Protestant Reformation which forbade the representation of religious figures in art and also, of the rise of the mer-

chant class as the main purchaser of art. While Dutch painters of the time dealt with seemingly prosaic subject matter however, they treated the objects of everyday life as vehicles for a higher symbolic meaning. Thus, the objects in still-life paintings of this period often contained a hidden allegory, either on the transience of the things of the world and the inevitability of death, or, by extension, on the Christian Passion and Resurrection.<sup>1</sup> For example, the inclusion of an hour-glass, clock or candle alluded to the passing of time while an overturned vessel such as a cup, pitcher or bowl symbolized emptiness. A crown, sceptre, jewels, purse or coins stood for the power and possessions of this world (often represented by a terrestrial globe) that death took away. A sword or other weapon served as a reminder that arms are no protection against death while flowers were symbols of short-livedness and hence of decay. The inclusion of a glass of wine or a pitcher and a loaf of bread-the eucharistic elements- indicated a specifically Christian meaning to the allegory. So, while everyday objects were depicted, the Dutch painters, far from celebrating these objects, were pointing to the evanescence or emptiness of earthly possessions given the fact of our mortality. They depicted the everyday not in order to elevate it, but on the contrary, to confirm its subordination to a higher spiritual realm, (though paradoxically, as Berger points out, the technique of oil painting enhanced the tangibility of the objects depicted, making them seem real and more desirable)<sup>2</sup>.

It was not until the Impressionists in the late nineteenth century that the domestic re-emerged as a significant theme in art. Prior to this time, artists were governed by a hierarchy of genres of art which elevated

certain subjects over others. This hierarchy was codified by the art academies which were the main training ground for artists in post-Renaissance Europe. The highest category in oil painting was considered to be the history or mythological picture while the genres of the still life, the portrait and the landscape were less highly esteemed. In their revolt against the strictures of the art academies of the time, the Impressionists began to depict subjects previously deemed not worthy of the elevated realm of art including still lifes and domestic scenes. The genre of still life painting was rehabilitated by such artists as Fantin Latour and Cezanne while the portrayal of domestic interiors made their re-appearance particularly in the works of the female Impressionists such as Cassatt and Morisot as well as in some of the works of the male Impressionists such as Bonnard.

The significance of the depiction of everyday objects by these artists was quite different from that of the Dutch paintings of the seventeenth century. Whereas the Dutch artists had used everyday objects only to confirm their lowly status in relation to a higher spiritual realm, the Impressionists treated the realm of the everyday as being equal in significance to the other spheres of life traditionally regarded as "higher". For the Impressionists, what was of primary importance was not what the artist depicted but rather the way in which it was depicted, i.e. they were primarily interested in achieving different light and atmospheric effects through the utilization of various techniques of applying paint to canvas. So whether the subject was a bowl of fruit or a cathedral was of little moment to them since both could serve equally well for their formal experimentation. The subject matter they chose was that which

was readily at hand. This recognition of the prosaic as an area worthy of aesthetic investigation received theoretical elaboration in the writings of Baudelaire who, in his famous essay "The Painter of Modern Life", exhorted artists to find the poetry in everyday life rather than search for a transcendent realm of beauty. In his view, the artist should become like the child or the convalescent who "is possessed in the highest degree of the faculty of keenly interesting himself in things, be they apparently of the most trivial."<sup>3</sup>

Following the Impressionist rehabilitation of the everyday, artists such as Braque and Picasso in his Cubist phase went so far as to incorporate actual objects such as bits of newspapers, cigarette packages, wallpaper, pieces of woven basket and cloth etc into their artworks. The aim of their incorporation of "found" objects into their collages was to re-establish the link between art and everyday life - a link which had become ever more tenuous with the growing abstraction from recognizable objects and figures which had occurred during the earlier phases of Cubism. Because such objects were readily identifiable, being an integral part of people's everyday lives, they served to make a bridge between people's customary modes of perception and the artist's work. In Braque's own words, he introduced foreign substances into his paintings because of their 'materiality'; and by this he was referring not only to their physical, tactile values, but also to the sense of material certainty they evoked.<sup>4</sup> At the same time however, these objects were often used in ways which subverted their usual everyday meaning, particularly in the works of Picasso who took great delight in using fragments of reality paradoxically, turning one substance into another and

extracting unexpected meanings out of forms by combining them in new ways. Thus for example, Picasso would turn a piece of newspaper into a violin or the handles of a bicycle into the head of a bull. Sometimes too, Braque and Picasso would simulate real objects by including printed images of them rather than using the real thing, e.g. a printed image of caning on oilcloth rather than real chair caning or a simulated wood grain printed on paper. The elements of reality which they selected were emblems of modernity based mostly on industrial mass production. The inclusion of such elements in the midst of their opposite - the hand-made object - served to heighten their incongruity. So, while the eruption of reality fragments into the realm of art in one respect served to anchor art in life, in another, it undermined people's taken for granted assumptions about the nature of everyday objects.<sup>5</sup>

This importation of fragments of reality into the realm of art went a step further with the Dadaists who produced works which consisted solely of everyday objects which they found by chance. Schwitters for instance, created collages out of rubbish - i.e. the bits and pieces of detritus which he collected on his walks around the streets of Hanover while Duchamp created what he termed "ready-mades" which consisted in the selection of manufactured items such as a bicycle wheel, a bottle rack, a snow shovel or a urinal which he placed in the art gallery largely untransformed except for the addition of a signature. The aim of these artists in importing the mundane into the elevated sphere of art was to desacralize art.<sup>6</sup> They sought to challenge the hierarchy which elevated art above the objects of everyday use by making art out of the

most prosaic of items. It was for this reason that discarded items and the lowliest of everyday objects such as a urinal which referred to base bodily functions were selected. Speaking of the criteria governing his selection of objects, Duchamp wrote "the choice of these ready-mades was never dictated by an aesthetic delectation. The choice was based on a reaction of visual indifference, with at the same time a total absence of good or bad taste, in fact a complete anaesthesia." So, rather than finding the poetry in the everyday as the Impressionists had done, the aim of the Dadaists was to make art prosaic. In keeping with this aim, the objects selected were mass produced items which bore no trace of those who had manufactured them, so challenging the cult of the individuality of the artist upon which the "religion" of art was premised. By making "art" out of such objects, the implication was that the creation of art was not some special activity which required a person of exceptional genius or talent but could be produced by anyone. The only input of the artist consisted simply in the selection of the objects (which itself was a rather random process) and in the appending of his signature. While traditionally, the artist's signature had served as an indication that the work was the outcome of a unique individual, in Duchamp's ready mades it functioned as a travesty of the notion of individual creativity as well as unmasking the art market where the economic value of a work depends solely on who has produced it.

The Surrealists also had a fascination for the everyday, composing works which consisted in the disconcerting juxtaposition of randomly chosen, mundane objects. Sometimes this involved the use of actual

objects as in the case of the assemblages by Man Ray such as his Gift which consisted in a flat iron to whose sole he added a row of nails and the works of Cornell who constructed boxes which resembled specimen cabinets to display his motley assortment of objects, while in other cases these objects were painted (as in the works of de Chirico, Magritte, Dali, Miro and Ernst) or photographed ( e.g. Brassai, Man Ray). While the Surrealists shared with the Dadaists the aim of overcoming the gulf between art and everyday life, they sought to achieve this in precisely the opposite fashion to the Dadaists. Thus, rather than making art prosaic by importing the everyday into the realm of art, they sought to make the ordinary seem extraordinary.<sup>8</sup> Their aim was to show that the "marvellous" resided in the most seemingly mundane objects and in order to reveal this "sur-reality" which was contained in the everyday, they removed objects from their usual contexts, placing them in new configurations which made them appear strange and uncanny. This "sur-reality" was not understood in the sense of a higher spiritual sphere but on the contrary, referred to the hidden realm of unconscious desires- the "dark"and irrational side of human nature that was normally repressed by civilization. For the Surrealists then, everyday objects became "fetishes" in the Freudian sense of the term, i.e. they acquired a psychological charge insofar as they became emblems of repressed sexual desires and anxieties. This accounted for the obsessive way in which they were treated by the Surrealists. Certain objects constantly recurred in the work of the Surrealists, these being the objects which served as potent embodiments of those forbidden desires and unconscious anxieties which could not otherwise be directly expressed. Normally, the realm of the unconscious was only



revealed in dreams or in the ramblings of the insane, but the Surrealists sought access to it through the medium of chance association. It was felt that only by removing the censorship of the conscious, rational mind could the world of unconscious desire be revealed. Lautreamont's statement that beauty consisted in "the chance encounter, on an operating table, of a sewing machine and an umbrella"<sup>9</sup> became the guiding credo of the Surrealists.

The sorts of objects which the Surrealists collected came mainly from the endless profusion of manufactured objects that washed up in the flea market. They were not antiques or collectables but junk. Almost anything could be had at the flea market for virtually nothing. As Hughes puts it, "it was like the unconscious mind of capitalism itself: it contained the rejected or repressed surplus of objects, the losers, the outcast thoughts."<sup>10</sup> The Surrealists preferred objects that were no longer regarded as useful since their aim was to redeem that which had been devalued by the instrumental rationality of capitalist society. They celebrated the purposelessness of objects and the way they exceeded the uses for which they had been originally designed. Furthermore, the more banal the object, the more suitable it was for revealing the strange and the uncanny. The idea was to collect objects so ordinary that they normally went unnoticed so as to heighten the sense of the marvellous which was revealed when they were recontextualized with other objects, equally as mundane. As Man Ray wrote, "I pick up something which in itself has no meaning at all. I disregard completely the aesthetic quality of the object; I am against craftsmanship. I say the world's full of wonderful craftsmen, but there are very

found objects gleaned from his walks around the city streets of New York, Rauschenberg emphasized the quotidian nature of these objects. He deliberately did not interfere too much with them, seeking to emphasize their "given" quality.

The interest of artists in the world of everyday objects developed in a new direction during the 1970's when a number of feminist artists began to make reference to the domestic in their work. Their aim was to challenge the patriarchal denigration of the domestic realm as inferior to the public arena. While subjects such as domestic labour, child rearing etc had generally not been regarded as topics worthy of consideration by artists, they now sought to reassert the importance of the domestic. As well as producing artworks which dealt with these subjects, several feminist artists also made use of the techniques and materials of the "female" crafts such as embroidery, tapestry, quilting, china painting etc, with the intention of challenging traditional definitions of art which excluded the female crafts, relegating them to an inferior position in the hierarchy of creative achievement.<sup>13</sup> Thus, for example, Miriam Schapiro made collages out of assorted pieces of material which she had collected. She referred to these as "femmages" in order to indicate the fact that the activity of collage was one which was not exclusive of artists working within the high art tradition but had also been practised for centuries by women who had used traditional craft techniques like sewing, piecing, hooking, quilting and appliqueing. The extensive use of fabric swatches, patchwork and embroidery, as both formal and iconographic elements in Schapiro's femmages were part of her conscious effort to re-establish her connections with this

feminine tradition. As Schapiro has written, "In my paintings...I try to acknowledge and to underscore the realities of women's lives. In a new series of collages, I have glued in a painting by Mary Cassatt. I collaborate with women out of the past, as I do with the women I actually work with, to bring women's experience to the world."<sup>14</sup> In her work she also sought to overturn the traditional denigration of the decorative which had been undervalued because of its association with the feminine.

Since the 1970's, the world of everyday objects has continued to serve as a source of inspiration for many artists such as Jeff Koons, Rosemarie Trockel and Haim Steinbach. Similarly, in the works of the artists in this exhibition, this same fascination with the banal is evident. For each of these artists, the everyday is regarded as a legitimate realm of investigation for art. While the Dadaists thought that through their use of commonplace objects, the continued existence of art would be threatened and the Pop artists wondered whether art could survive the competition from advertising images, art has proved capable of absorbing the everyday. Far from undermining the project of art, the importation of the everyday into the realm of art has served to expand the boundaries of what is considered aesthetic. The works in this exhibition are a testimony to this.

Lewellyn Negrin, 1995

- 1 See Hall's *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (John Murray Publishers, 1992) pp. 291-2 for a discussion of the symbolic meanings of everyday objects in Dutch still life paintings.
- 2 Berger develops this argument in his book *Ways Of Seeing* (B.B.C. and Penguin Books, 1984) ch. 5. See also Foster's article "The Art of Fetishism" in *Fetish* ed. by Whiting S., Mitchell E., and Lynn G (Princeton Architectural Press, 1992).
- 3 Baudelaire C., "The Painter of Modern Life" in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (London, Phaidon Press, 1964) p. 7.
- 4 Quoted by Golding J., "Cubism" in *Concepts of Modern Art* ed. by Stangos N., (Thames and Hudson, 1981) p. 62.
- 5 See *ibid.* pp. 62-3 for a discussion of this.
- 6 See Burger P., *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984) pp. 22, 29, 51-3, 56 for a useful discussion of the aims of the Dadaists.
- 7 Quoted by Ades D. in "Dada and Surrealism" in *Concepts of Modern Art* op. cit. p. 119.
- 8 See Hughes R., *The Shock of the New*, (B.B.C., 1980) ch. 5 for a useful discussion of the aims of Surrealism.
- 9 Quoted in Ades D. op. cit. p. 126.
- 10 Hughes R., op. cit. p. 241.
- 11 Quoted in *ibid.* p. 243.
- 12 See *ibid.* ch. 7 for a useful discussion of Pop art.
- 13 See Parker R. and Pollock G., *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (Pandora Press, 1987) ch. 2 for a discussion of these issues. Also, see Kirby S., *Sight Lines* (Craftsman House, 1992) ch. 4 for a discussion of the use of the female crafts by feminist artists in Australia.
- 14 Quoted by Broude N., "Miriam Schapiro and 'Femmage': Reflections on the Conflict Between Decoration and abstraction in Twentieth Century Art" in *Feminism and Art History* ed. by Broude N. et al (Harper and Row, 1982) p. 326. This article contains a useful discussion of Schapiro's work.

the aRtistS

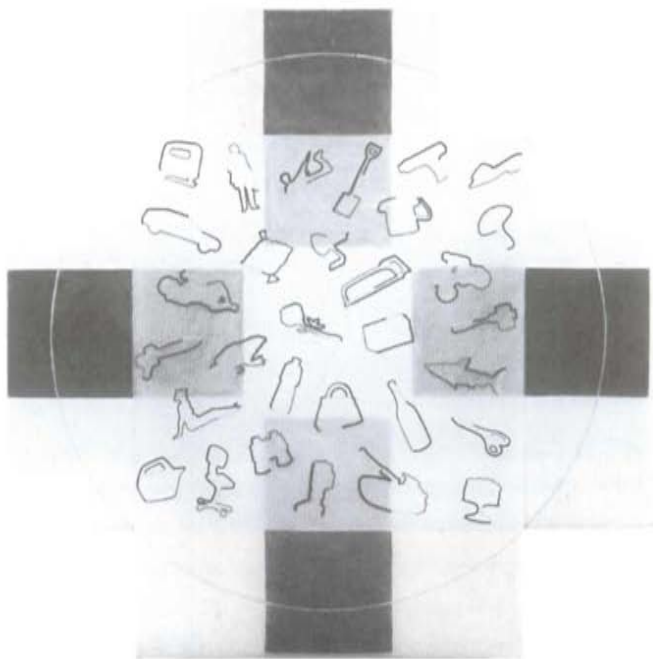
# Elizabeth Gower

born Adelaide

South Australia 1952

Elizabeth Gower graduated with a Diploma of Art and Design from the Prahan College of Advanced Education in Melbourne in 1973 and received a Diploma of Education from Mercer House Teachers College, Melbourne in 1974. Her work has been exhibited widely since 1975 and has been selected for major survey exhibitions including the *Biennale of Sydney* in 1979; *Australian Perspectives* in 1981 and 1985; *Recent Australian Painting: A Survey 1970-1973* in 1983 and the *Moet et Chandon Touring Exhibition* in 1988. She has also had seventeen solo exhibitions and is a recipient of many awards including an Australia Council Visual Arts/Craft Board Professional Development Grant in 1990.

Elizabeth Gower lives in Melbourne and lectures at the Victorian College for the Arts and at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology where she is also completing her Master of Arts degree.



Elizabeth Gower  
*As Time Goes By*, 1990

## Ruth Hadlow

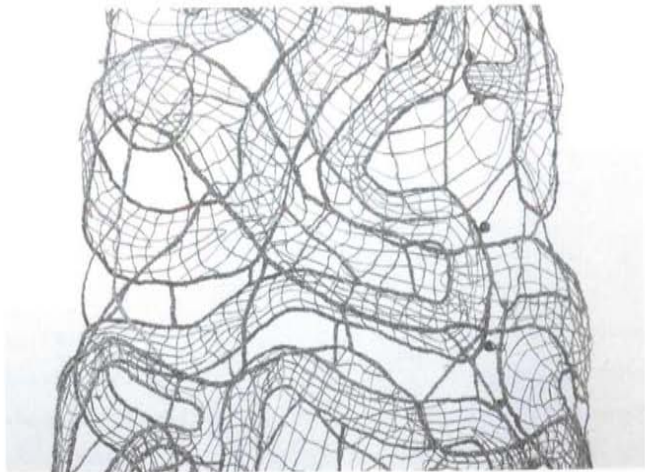
born Swan Hill

Victoria 1963

Ruth Hadlow graduated with a Bachelor of Visual Arts from Edith Cowan University, Western Australia in 1990. She also completed Traineeships in Puppetmaking and Design between 1988 and 1991. In 1993 Ruth Hadlow undertook a two-month residency at the Jam Factory Craft and Design Centre, Adelaide which culminated in a solo exhibition titled *an inner garden: embroidering on air*. She freelances in theatre design and construction and has an ongoing involvement with community arts projects.

Ruth Hadlow lives and works in Tasmania and is a recipient of a 1994-95 Arts Tasmania Professional Development Grant.





Ruth Hadlow  
*Bodily Functions, Baggage and  
The Basic Necessities (detail), 1995*

# Penelope Lee

born Melbourne

Victoria 1961

Penelope Lee completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in 1988 followed by a Graduate Diploma at the same institution in 1990. She has been exhibiting since 1988 and has had four solo shows. Her work was included in *Vitae: A.I. P. # 7* as part of the *Fifth Australian Sculpture Triennial* in 1993. In the same year she was awarded an Australia Council Visual Arts/Craft Board Overseas Studio Residency in Tokyo, Japan. During 1994 her work was selected for inclusion in *The Aberrant Object: Women, Dada and Surrealism*, at the Museum of Modern Art at Heide, Melbourne and *Aussemblage*, a national touring exhibition generated by the Auckland City Art Gallery, New Zealand.

Penelope Lee lives and works in Melbourne.



Penelope Lee

*Clean up your act*, 1994 (not included in exhibition)

Steel tissue box, zip, flag, duster, tea towel

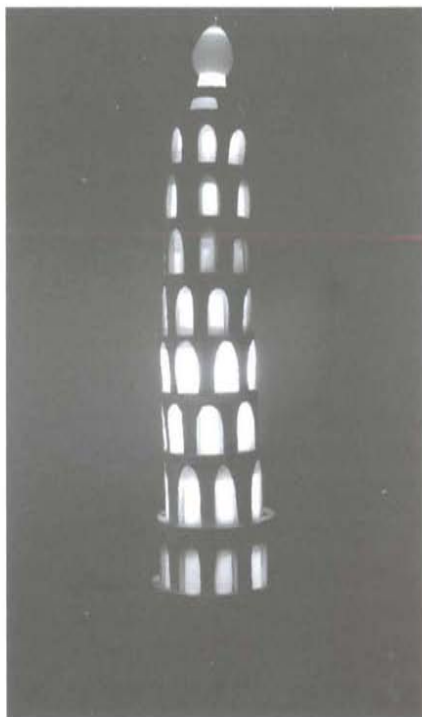
## Anna Phillips

born Cheshire

England 1958

Anna Phillips came to live in Tasmania in 1969. She has worked as a nurse and midwife since 1974 and in 1988 completed a Bachelor of Applied Science (Nursing) at the Tasmanian State Institute of Technology. She undertook further studies in the early 1990s and in 1994 received a Bachelor of Fine Arts with Honours from the Tasmanian School of Art at Hobart, University of Tasmania. During her studies Anna Phillips won two awards in the 1993 *National Tertiary Student Awards Exhibition* and received first prize in the student section of the 1994 *Hobart Rotary Club Art Exhibition*. She has been exhibiting since 1991 and her work was included in *Home is Where the Art is* Artspace , Adelaide in 1994.

Anna Phillips lives in Hobart and is currently undertaking a Master of Fine Arts at the Tasmanian School of Art at Hobart, University of Tasmania.



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Anna Phillips  
*First We'll swim The Bosphorus, 1994*

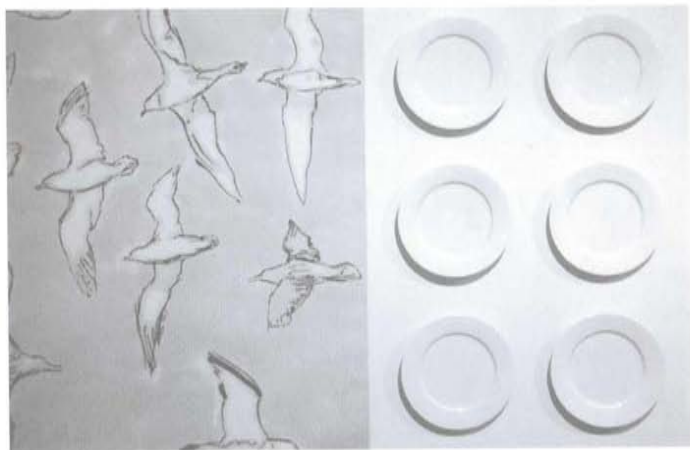
## Piki Verschueren

born Brussels

Belgium 1958

Piki Verschueren graduated from St Lukas Institute for Visual Arts, Brussels in 1980. She moved to Sydney at the end of 1984 where she lectured at the Sydney College for the Arts. Piki Verschueren has participated in several important group exhibitions both in Belgium and Australia and her work was included in the exhibition *Frames of Reference - Aspects of Feminism and Art*, a component of the *Dissonance Project* held in Sydney during 1991 and *Australian Perspecta* in 1993. She has had seven solo exhibitions, the most recent being *Void Objects* at Mori Gallery, Sydney in 1994.

Piki Verschueren lives and works in Sydney.



Piki Verschueren  
*The anti-room (detail)*, 1993

# Guan Wei

born Beijing

China 1957

Guan Wei began his painting career in 1978. He graduated from the Department of Fine Arts Beijing Teachers College in 1986. In 1989 and again in 1991-92 he was Artist in Residence at the Tasmanian School of Art at Hobart, University of Tasmania. Guan Wei has also held residencies at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney in 1993 and at the Canberra School of Art, Australian National University in 1994. He has participated in many important national and international shows including *Mao Goes Pop* in 1993 and *Localities of Desire: Contemporary Art in an International World* in 1994, both at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art.

Guan Wei lives and works in Sydney and in 1994 he was awarded an Australia Council Visual Arts/Craft Board Fellowship Grant.





Guan Wei  
*Sausage No. 3, 1994*

measurements in cms and height before width unless otherwise stated

### **Elizabeth Gower**

*Beyond the Everyday*, 1990  
Acrylic on drafting film  
257 x 554

*As Time Goes By*, 1990  
Acrylic on drafting film  
231 x 231

works and collection of coat hangers courtesy the artist

### **Ruth Hadlow**

*Bodily Functions, Baggage and the Basic Necessities*, 1995  
Plant fibre and sand  
220(h) x 150(w) x 300(d)

work and collection of doyleys courtesy the artist

### **Penelope Lee**

*Forbidden Fruits*, 1994  
Custom wood, hooks, leather, artificial fruits  
240 x 100

*Don't air your dirty laundry in Public*, 1994  
Wood, brass handle, linen bags  
75 x 56 and variable size linen bags

*Out of Sight, Out of Mind*, 1994  
Window frames and mixed media  
5 components  
each 113 x 92

works and collection of zippers courtesy the artist

### **Anna Phillips**

*First we'll swim The Bosphorus*, 1994  
Plastic, steel, tile grout  
250(h) x 48(dia) x 150(circ)

*Human Inspiration Virus*, 1994

Plastic, steel, tile grout

1780(h) x 100(dia) x 300(circ)

*Quest*, 1995

Plastic, linoleum, tile grout

180(h) x 180(w) x 20(d)

The artist acknowledges Noel Harwood's assistance with the making of this work.

works and collection of paper boxes and baskets courtesy the artist

## **Piki Verschueren**

*The anti-room*, 1993

Wax resist printed on canvas and ceramic plates

5 components

each 167 x 152

works courtesy Mori Gallery, Sydney

## **Guan Wei**

*Sausage No. 1*, 1994

Acrylic on canvas 87 x 46

*Sausage No. 2*, 1994

Acrylic on canvas 87 x 46

*Sausage No. 3*, 1994

Acrylic on canvas 87 x 46

*Sausage No. 4*, 1994

Acrylic on canvas 87 x 46

*Sausage No. 5*, 1994

Acrylic on canvas 87 x 46

*Sausage No. 6*, 1994

Acrylic on canvas 87 x 46

*Sausage No. 7*, 1994

Acrylic on canvas 87 x 46

*Sausage No. 8*, 1994

Acrylic on canvas 87 x 46

*Sausage No. 9*, 1994

Acrylic on canvas 87 x 46

works courtesy the artist

**curation and  
co-ordination**

Heather B. Swann and Mary Scott.

**foreword**

Heather B. Swann and Mary Scott.

**Catalogue essay**

Llewellyn Negrin.

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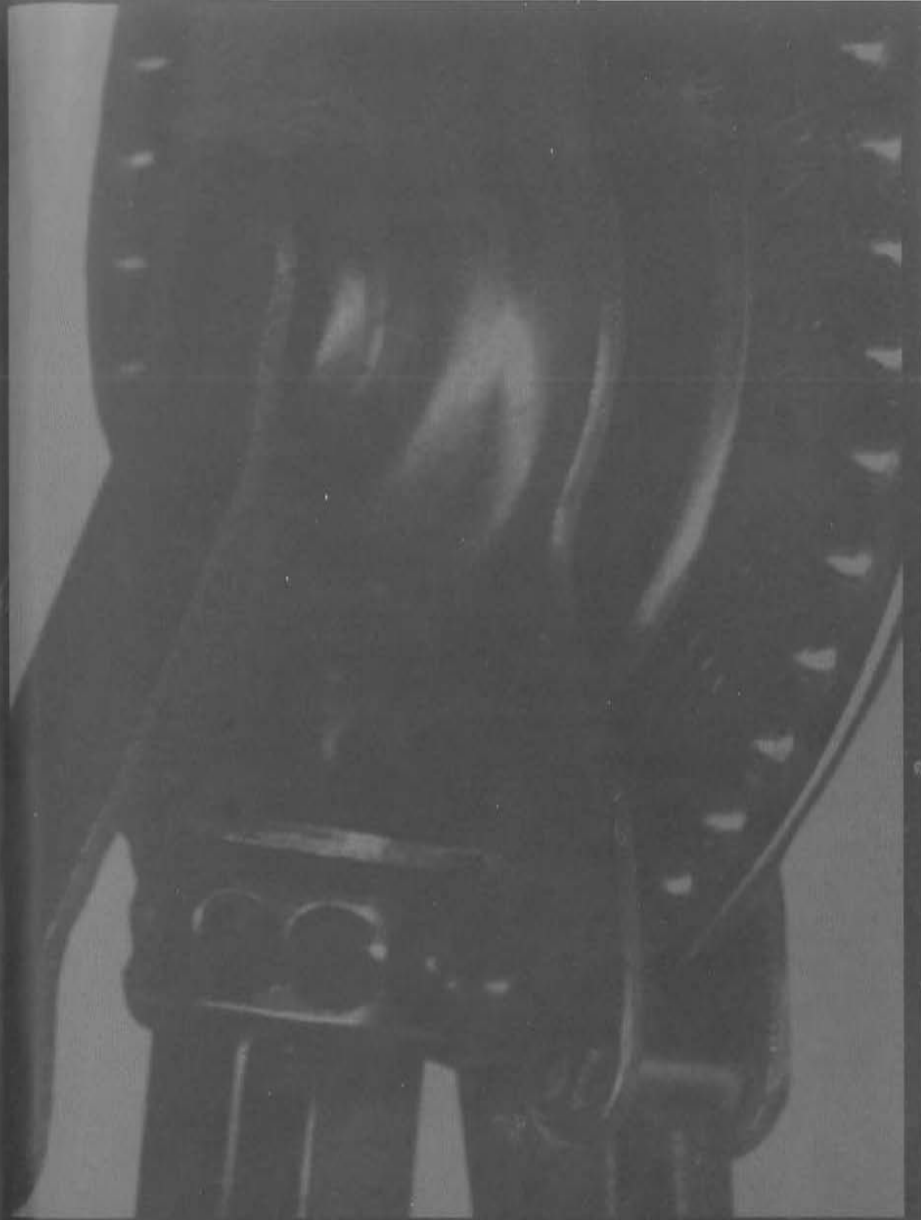
Thanks are extended to the participating artists for their generous co-operation and support and to Sherman Galleries for their assistance. Special thanks also to Pat Brassington and members of the Plimsoll Gallery Committee

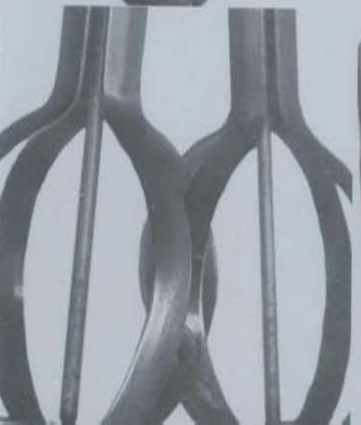
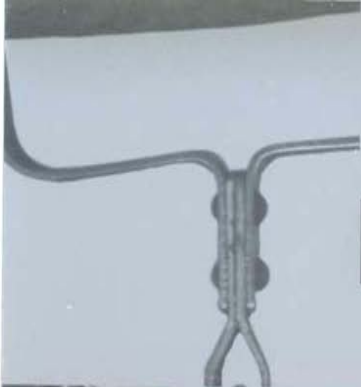
**The cOLlectAbJe EggbeaTer**

Plimsoll Gallery, Centre for the Arts, Hunter Street, Hobart.  
3rd-26th March, 1995.

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The cOllEctAbLe EggbeaTEr