Fabricating the Aesthetics of Mass through the Machine
Made Multiple.

By

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Signed Statement of originality

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the aesthetic of the multiple with an emphasis on material and process. Through a series of artworks both formal and informal displays of repetition are explored, focusing on the three-dimensional object in multiple and investigating links to repeat surface pattern.

The project is placed in context with art practices that employ the use of the multiple, exploit the value of banal objects and demonstrate a labour intensive approach in the making process. These artists include Tom Friedman, Donna Marcus, Fiona Hall, Leonardo Drew and Do-Ho Suh. The theoretical investigation into pattern and ornament, installation, order and mass production and modernism includes a reflection on the writings of E.H. Gombrich, Debra Schafter, James Trilling, Claire Bishop, Brigitta Olubas, Z. Kracauer, Ray Batchelor, Susan Stewart and Nicolas Bourriaud.

Strong influencing factors from primary experiences impact on the process. Factory work embedded the effects of repetitive labour and its accumulative outcome on production and the body. A life-long interest in decorative domestic crafts has established direct repetitive processes in the art making. Memories of these experiences are reflected in the final aesthetic.

The art making is approached systematically involving the separation of the different stages of fabrication. Attention is focused on one stage at a time which then develops into a repetitive task. This way of working ensures a degree of uniformity, and produces an accumulation of component parts that motivates the labour by regulating the progress. The activity of the assembly line is replicated in the multiple arrangement of units and the monotonous tasks of the process. Used and discarded objects are transformed through a labour intensive process in an attempt to relocate the hand-made in contemporary art making practice.
and question our engagement with single-use products. Each object is reduced to an unfamiliar form and treated as pure material. Although alien in appearance, the material is familiar enough for recognition to play a part in the spectator’s engagement with the work.

The artworks and installations in this thesis align the aesthetic outcomes of mass production with the visual codes of pattern and decoration. It situates vernacular making processes in contemporary art practice and exploits the notion of repetition and the multiple through actions and choice of material. This aesthetic is based on simple elements, the use of everyday objects and a sense of playfulness with an aim of delivering the experience of mass.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCING THE AESTHETICS OF THE MULTIPLE

PART 1:

The Aesthetics of Mass

The mass aesthetic can be seen all around us, in arrangements of cereal boxes on supermarket shelves, in stacks of car tyres outside service stations and cardboard boxes stored in warehouses. There is no intention in these displays to create an 'aesthetic' as in an art context: they are merely the outcome of convenience. The resulting mass aesthetic occurs accidentally and often goes unnoticed, perhaps because the individual object and the environment in which it is displayed are equally banal.

I have always been drawn to these simple arrangements of objects. Always different and yet the same they abide by the same basic rules of repetition and geometry. Regardless of the object, a stack of firewood obeys the same principles of order as does a stack of takeaway food containers, those of continuity and balance. The image they present is the expression of mass. More importantly however, in my personal reading of the aesthetic, is the evidence of human activity in the construction. Although the resulting aesthetic can be
viewed as accidental, the process of making the stacks involves a degree of intent. The wood pile requires stability and displays of consumer goods require precise presentation. Both involve thoughtful planning and labour to execute the construction.

Fig. 2; Overcoats in Copenhagen (archival photograph)

The retail display is designed to draw our attention. Products that the retailer wishes to promote are generally displayed at the front of the store so that customers are immediately engaged and encouraged to buy. Those products like bread and milk, which are bought regularly, don't need to be promoted so they can afford to be placed on the outer perimeter of the store knowing that customers will seek them out regardless of how non-visible they are. This position is also at the rear end of the long diagonal to maximize the shopper's exposure to products as they pass through on their way to the milk. The intent of the product display is to create a commercial impact rather than an ornamental one with the intended focus on the individual object. We are drawn to the display of mass and after we have quickly scanned it, unaware that we have even done so, we extract the individual from it. Aesthetically these displays only work as ornament as long as no one removes a unit from the whole. If one or more units are absent this causes a break in the overall pattern disrupting the
order of the multiple. It breaks the reading of the surface as a plane which relies on the consistency of the repeated units. The formality of the pattern may be compromised but the mass, however, remains intact.

The factory environment is the ideal repository for the mass aesthetic. For a period of time I worked in an industrial laundry. The factory was, for me, a totally immersive experience of mass. I passed my time there not only as a contributor to the aesthetic but as an observer. Nothing new was manufactured there. Soiled linen entered and clean linen left. The laundry catered for major hospitals and institutions so there was plenty of opportunity to observe bulk. Up to 400 kilograms of pressed linen was processed from one industrial ironer every 15 minutes. I remember there being at least five ironers. Nearly all processes were mechanised with the workers facilitating the movement of linen in and out of machinery. Sorting belts, washers, dryers, ironers, dry cleaners, mending and dispatch operated as an automaton processing vast quantities of materials that relied on a highly ordered system to function productively. It was an environment of mass that kept workers and machinery operating in perpetual motion. All around me were grids, piles of linen, machinery and hardware in multiples. Order was a matter of necessity.
The experiences I had at the laundry allow me now to look at a store of bed sheets and dissect the sequence of events that led to its final arrangement because of the memory of my own experience. As John Berger states "The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe." How we look at a wood pile involves perceptive faculties other than vision, that is, we don’t simply read it as a pattern. We know that the logs are roughly cylindrical and must be stacked in an order that will be stable. We know they are heavy so we understand that hard work is needed to complete the task. We have a sense of the texture and smell of wood even if we view it from a distance. These perceptions are based on past experience which we bring to our comprehension of the wood pile and how it came to be.

We try to apply this same knowledge to other displays of order, such as surface pattern and ornament, to make sense of what we are looking at. Debra Schafter describes the role of ornament as perceptual signifier. She states that "...Ornament stimulates optical and tactile sensations by recalling past sensory events and, consequently, helps the viewer understand formal elements and their relationships" and that it can trigger in the viewer a perceptual memory of past sensory activity. As displays of order, pattern and ornament also follow the principles of repetition and continuity. The rules that govern pattern and ornament, however, are incumbent upon tradition and laws of geometry and are unlikely to result from accident. Although pattern and ornament can encompass mass, they are more likely to be classified as applied arts such as wall paper, textiles and intricate carvings.

In 1927 Siegfried Kracauer wrote *The Mass Ornament* as a key to interpreting the social conditions of the times. Kracauer’s ‘mass’ refers to the populace and ‘ornament’ to the geometric patterns formed by large numbers of people.

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2 Schafter, Debra; *The Order Of Ornament, The Structure Of Style*; U.K. University Press; Cambridge; 2003; p. 3.
sometimes thousands as in the "Tiller" displays. Working with ordinary people such as office girls, John Tiller organized choreographed displays of pattern and synchronized movement, ornaments which were enjoyed by the masses "who themselves were arranged in row upon ordered row". Kracauer’s belief was that these displays of ornament were a reflection of contemporary situations. The arms and legs of the individuals, who themselves were unable to view the whole, became meaningless in the sight of the overall ornament. Similarly, individual workers on assembly lines became meaningless in the capitalist profit system.

![Fig. 4; The Tiller Girls](image.jpg)

The American photographer Eugene O. Goldbeck used the spectacle of mass public displays as a tool for documentation. He toured the country photographing troops of soldiers and marching bands as well as popular public events that drew vast crowds of spectators. The troops were often arranged to form the shape of their state of residence or the emblem associated with their unit.

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4 Kracauer, Zeigfried, p. 462.

5 Although my interest lies more in the aesthetic than the political I was excited to find this connection to mass production. It also assists in placing the worker within the process.
Similarly, contemporary artist Spencer Tunick arranges masses of naked bodies but informally and packed tightly. United by nudity and similar stances the mass of individuals becomes one body, a vulnerable living organ at rest on the surface of the land.

The Tiller Girls belong to an entertainment history which preceded the likes of the Zeigfield Follies and Busby Berkeley. As a vehicle showcasing beauty, ornament was their sole purpose. Meaning did not extend beyond entertainment.
The creation of beauty to elicit pleasure, so often attributed to the lower forms of art, is still an authentic experience for the senses. James Trilling states that "ornament is decoration in which the visual pleasure of form significantly outweighs the communicative value of content," declaring also that if the viewer cannot enjoy the form without understanding it, then it is probably not ornament. Trilling stresses that visual pleasure must be paramount for ornament to succeed.

The films of Busby Berkeley transferred the extravaganza and pageantry of Broadway onto the cinema screen. These films which were designed purely for spectacle and entertainment fired my imagination as a child. The dancers were arranged in tightly choreographed symmetrical dance sequences in linear and circular patterns, where the movement and ornament radiated from a central axis. Often it was difficult to know exactly what I was looking at. With the camera suspended directly above the dancers, Berkeley was able to capture the geometrical arrangements of the dancers as they had never been seen before. The dancers became an 'artificial' circular motif similar to rose windows and kaleidoscopes.

Fig. 7; Busby Berkeley, *Gold Diggers of 1933*, 1933.

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7 Ibid; p. 23
Gombrich sees the kaleidoscope as the ideal starting point for the exploration of the interaction between objects and patterns. Our acceptance of pattern allows us to read the arrangement of ordinary objects as constructs of simple order. In Berkeley’s films separate objects, or dancers, are transformed into things of beauty and can be viewed as an ornament. Colour was unnecessary to the illusion, as the black and white tones created a focus on movement and form and camouflaged the reality of the bodies.

Aesthetically, the ornament of Bushy Berkeley’s dancers is no different to the spectacle of military marches. The arrangement of identically uniformed soldiers marching in unison still demands to be perceived as a whole rather than as separate units. Unlike Berkeley’s intention to evoke beauty and pleasure, the desired effect here is patriotism and might, the moral transcending the ocular. Nevertheless this aesthetic also relies on mass to be effective.

Meg Keating is a Hobart artist who draws the themes for her paper cuts from first hand experience of displays of military might. In 2000 she was overwhelmed by the intense scale of a military rally in Tiananmen Square. She described it as a celebratory spectacle, a sublime experience that simultaneously defined absolute beauty and sheer terror. Her work, The Great March, 2001,

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9 Interview with the artist
replicated the formations of marching soldiers through Tiananmen Square. The 280 or more identical silhouettes were individually cut by hand. This attention to the singular, instead of employing laser cutting techniques to rapidly produce multiples, confronts the notion of mass production and the subsumed individual. The scale of the piece is almost too large to take in all at once, hinting at the artist’s own experience.

Fig. 9; Meg Keating, *The Great March*, 2001

Such animated ornamental spectacles need to be experienced in person to solicit a full emotional response. Conversely, the Busby Berkeley sequences were designed to be viewed in reproduction on the cinema screen. With the goal being nothing more than a visual spectacle designed to entertain, the viewer does not need to be present in order for the ornament to work. Military marches and mass gymnastic displays rely on the spectator being moved by the experience in order to be effective. As the viewer engages with the crowd and the display, his/her senses are assaulted by sight, smell and sound and the closeness of other bodies that are equally aroused. The viewer’s or spectator’s presence allows for an immediate and shared sensorial experience. In the television documentary *A State of Mind*, 2004, interviews with the participants of the Mass Games in North Korea which are political spectacles of synchronized gymnastics involving thousands of athletes, expose their unquestioning commitment and loyalty to the regime. Documentary maker
Daniel Gordon introduces the Games as "North Korea's socialist realism extravaganza and a perfect example of the state's ideology; the subordination of the individual to the needs of the collective." The elaborate display is intended, as Gordon states, for the eyes of the citizen and not the outsider as an effective reminder of the power of a unified consciousness.

The overriding purpose of these mass ornaments is the manipulation of the viewer. The ornament or spectacle is engineered to be viewed as a whole, the same way that it is performed. On television or in photographs the image is condensed to a size where the viewer can take in the entire image. It is impossible to feel engulfed by the spectacle. The position of the viewer differs from being contained to that of containing.

The closest I’ve come to being present at such an event is as a spectator at a big soccer game. As Kracauer acknowledged the audience at a Tiller display being ordered in their seating, so were we arranged in ascending rows framing the grassy oval where the event was to take place. A sea of spectators in a full to capacity stadium is a prime example of mass aesthetic where even the metaphor of the sea confirms the loss of the individual to the whole. As a frame, the spectators were already ornamental, like a carved frame around a painting designed to draw attention to the central focus. The ornament became animated when the crowd spontaneously broke into a “Mexican Wave”. The magic of the wave was its totally unrehearsed quality. It was an impromptu orchestration of sequential body movements where the entire stadium appeared to move as a single body. Even the mistimed mistakes of individuals disappeared in the giant swell as arms and bodies became absorbed into a singular moving line. As a participator it was impossible to see the full effect of the ornament. What part could be seen was what lay across the other side of the oval; however the

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10 Gordon, Daniel; A State of Mind; BBC/ARTE; 2004
11 I return to notions of containment in Chapter Two under the subheading Installation.
feeling of being a part of the wave transcended any dissatisfaction of being unable to observe the whole.

As examples of the mass aesthetic *The Tiller Girls*, military marches and Mexican Waves all represent living ornaments. They also represent organized cultural displays where the intended outcome is creative, political or emotional. It is important to see the whole and not the individual, and in some cases to be bodily present, if they are to extract the desired response from the viewer. More importantly, the wonder of their precision provokes desire in the viewer to see the display as a single body and therefore become willing participants in the illusion.

PART II

The Material

The material employed in this research is common place and discarded. My relationship with it begins on rubbish collection day. I walk the neighbourhood early in the morning armed with garbage bags and hoping to stay ahead of the official council truck. I search for P.E.T. bottles and aluminium cans in all sizes, shapes and colours. As they are recyclable, household recycle bins are the ideal places to find them. Always in fear that someone will prevent me from gathering material I am grateful that I live in a state that doesn't provide a refund for these materials.\(^1\)

As I search for bottles I also scout for other items that are being discarded in large numbers that may provide material for future work. Mostly these are food

\(^1\) If a monetary value were placed on the object people would be less inclined to let go of their recyclables and I would be less inclined to explore these materials. Nevertheless I still feel awkward about being caught rummaging through my neighbours' bin.
and beverage containers. The supply of bottles tends to vary based on the seasons. In the colder months I usually have to cast my net further afield to reach my "quota". In warm weather or following a public holiday I can expect to fill my bags very quickly and closer to home. Generally, patterns of consumption ensure a steady source of material for collection.

Several trips home with garbage bags full of bottles on a weekly basis keeps the project in supply. After the collection I go through the process of washing and de-labelling. I get to know where the dirt tends to collect and I can assess the condition of each bottle. The contact feels intimate, almost sensual. My hands glide over the forms in the warm water and I become familiar with each curve and crevice. Touch becomes such an ingrained part of the process that my visual assessment of each work cannot be detached from the tactile. It pleases me to see them clean, sparkling, and waiting to dry. I have removed the marks of ownership and those of rejection. They look virginal once again. I begin to group them in their different types and can see the beginnings of mass. They have already become a different object.

The use of found objects in Art has already established the notion that the meaning of an object changes through the artist's gaze. In his text *Postproduction*, Nicolas Bourriaud returns to Marcel Duchamp whom, he explains, introduced the act of choosing as artistic process; asserting that giving a new idea to an object is where production begins.¹³

Brigitta Olubas looks at the practice of collecting or foraging in her review of work by Donna Marcus and Bruce Reynolds. She states that "such practices, through their elevation of the everyday, worked to nominate a new contingency of the self at the core of Modernist aesthetic experimentation,"¹⁴ and that these practices are being re-tested by these artists: "This altered perspective on the

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¹³ Bourriaud, Nicolas; *Postproduction*; Lukas & Sternberg; N.Y.; 2002; p. 25.
¹⁴ Olubas, Brigitta; *The Dirt Does My Thinking*; The UTS Review; Vol. 7; No. 2; Nov. 2001; p. 117
meanings of the self who makes is invoked firstly through the initial practice of scavenging for the materials themselves, in op-shops and in rubbish on our own or unfamiliar streets; the probing into piles of unknown objects from someone else's home............Banally, obviously, such a practice is an antidote to the seductions of modern consumer culture; released from the anxiety of choosing well, of making just the right purchase, with scavenging and op-shopping we are, for once, positioned by, found by, the thing we buy, retrieve or collect. Bourriaud's text extends the meaning of these objects by indicating that rather than imposing a form on a raw material, artists are using objects that are already in circulation on the cultural market; they are applying processes to a material that is already processed. Bourriaud introduces the flea market (which can encompass garage and car boot sales) as the "omnipresent referent for contemporary artistic practices". He describes it as a place where products of multiple provenances converge, waiting for new uses. It is the place where "past production is recycled and switches direction", where "an object is given a new idea".

The discarded materials I use are commonplace, mass produced and mass consumed. Passing briefly through our lives they are referred to as banal. The dictionary describes banal as "boringly ordinary and lacking in originality". When this project began, the focus was on surface pattern, which, through the viewer's familiarity with its common occurrence in the domestic/architectural environment, can itself be classified as banal. With the aim of slowing down the process of looking and thereby provoking a closer inspection of surface pattern, I introduced an unexpected element to the aesthetic, something that provoked the viewer to notice, even scrutinise the pattern. I sought to provide that unexpected element by employing everyday objects as source material for making the motifs. Beer cans cut into ribbons and then curled were turned into

13 Olubas, Brigitta; p. 118
16 Bourriaud, Nicolas; p. 13
17 Ibid; p. 28
18 Ibid; p. 29
delicate arabesque patterns. The effect of the aluminium’s coloured reflections aroused interest which was then followed by recognition of the material.\textsuperscript{19}

![Image of reflections from aluminium ribbons](image-url)

**Fig. 10; Doily, 2003, showing the reflections from the aluminium ribbons.**

An interest in the change of value of an object from highly desired to worthless during the course of one shopping week led me to examine the object from each end of the consumer relationship. Rows of soft drink bottles on supermarket shelves shine and sparkle with their sweet and thirst-quenching contents. Advertising promises us an improved lifestyle should we consume their products. John Berger asserts that publicity, as a system, makes only one proposal; “that we transform ourselves, or our lives, by buying something more.”\textsuperscript{20} Some labels are so iconic as to need little prompting to buy. Most of us are convinced that a particular product is the best and perhaps, unconsciously, we may be sure that we will be introducing a little glamour or ‘cool’ into our refrigerators.\textsuperscript{21} Judging by my personal observations on collection days there

\textsuperscript{19} Curiously, in terms of the research, the viewer’s interest in the making came last in the sequence.

\textsuperscript{20} Berger, John; *Ways of Seeing*; p. 131.

\textsuperscript{21} Mark Taylor, in one of the catalogue essays for the exhibition *Singular Forms (Sometimes Repeated)*, Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2004, points out that when advertising had reached a competitive frenzy during the mid 1960’s the object of desire became an image more than a thing. The consumer was buying into the image of the product and the life it promised. It could be said that this established an ongoing relationship between advertiser and consumer that continues to this day.
exists very definitely a preference for a particular brand. Regardless of brand I do think that the rows of bottles on the shelves look appealing. The individual bottles have attractive shapes and, if the rows are neat, they present a formidable mass aesthetic. One week later the empty container is thrown into the recycle bin and subsequently on a massive pile at the depot. Returning it to the production line, albeit my studio, seems somehow appropriate.

These cast-offs are not used as they are. I alter their appearance enough to remove obvious links to their original identity or intention. This is not to deceive the viewer as to the origin of the material. It is to restore the material to a pure form. The peculiar characteristics of the material are harnessed in this way and its identity is reinvented. Stripped of its brand and of any logical function it becomes merely a unit in the final assembly. Using a systematic method of combining the separate units creates an orderly pattern of mass and abundance, an aesthetic that everyone can relate to although we are not always aware of it. The combination of formal elements and everyday materials provides direct access for the viewer. Everyday things and familiar shapes allow the viewer to access their own experiences.

PART III

The Look of Order

Early within this project Ernst Gombrich’s Sense of Order provided a framework to understanding part of the psychology behind our drive to make patterns and the ways in which we perceive them. I responded positively to the notion that we have an inbuilt system of ordering our environment and that perception is not a passive activity. Gombrich explains; “The force of habit may be said to spring from the sense of order. It results from our resistance to change and our search for continuity. Where everything is in flux and nothing could
ever be predicted, habit establishes a frame of reference against which we can
plot the variety of experience.”

In other words we naturally look for something familiar on which to base our
understanding of how things work in our field of vision. With surface pattern,
we understand the underlying principle ordering it is in the repetition of the
same motif at regular intervals. Through our familiarity with this technique we
feel no surprise when we see it and we rarely look closely to see how it works.
We generally notice surface pattern in our peripheral vision and accept it as a
decorative surface. If, however, the regularity of the surface is broken or
interrupted by something alien within the pattern itself, our gaze will stop and
pause at this point until we have discerned what it is we are looking at.

Decorative surface pattern serves as a starting point in this investigation into
visual order. As an ornamental strategy to cover a two dimensional plane with
repeat motifs it is normally associated with the architectural plane.

In 1851, Gottfried Semper asserted that “the human urge to decorate and create
order gave birth to craft skills, the products of which provided the primary
elements of the earliest constructed dwellings.” He recognized that the early
Egyptians transformed the primitive textile enclosure into glazed terracotta and
other hard claddings. The pattern formed by the functional material becomes
abstracted into pure ornamental motif. By conveying the idea of the plane these
motifs operate as structural signs to give greater articulation to the surface. The
concept of planarity – the idea of the flat plane – conforms to precise laws of
arrangement (symmetry, proportion, balance and repetition). As an example,
Debra Schafter refers to the continuous organic decoration on the facade of the
Majolika Haus. The curvilinear elements of this ornament create a network of

22 Gombrich, E.H.; Sense of Order; p. 171.
23 Schafter, Debra; p. 32.
24 Ibid; p 118.
verticals and diagonals which unify the surface plane and provide directional cues to carry the eye upward.\textsuperscript{25}

![Image](https://example.com/image.png)

Fig. 11; Otto Wagner, \textit{Majolikahaus}, 1898-9

Similarly, the orderly arrangement of identical objects provides the same visual cues as two dimensional surface patterns to indicate planarity. Symmetry, proportion, balance and repetition are the elements displayed in an arrangement of common objects. Although the units may be three dimensional, the sequential regularity of the objects leads the eye across the arrangement in horizontal, vertical and diagonal scans. We read the surface value of the patterns made by objects such as a row of book spines or the edges of a pile of folded linen in a similar way that we read surface pattern. The shape of one object – the curve of its form, the shadow at the point of contact with the next object, the identical reflection on the surface of the material, all lead the eye sequentially from one to the next in rapid succession until we have scanned the arrangement as we would a two dimensional plane. This is how Semper’s notion of the abstract ornamental motif works. A construction built from three-dimensional objects is represented in abstract form as two dimensional motifs which in turn represent the architectural plane.

\textsuperscript{25} Schafer, Debra; p 121.
PART IV

Mass Production and Modernism

The objective of commercial mass production is to create uniform perfection, to eliminate the errors of the hand and thereby deny individuality. The individual is sacrificed for the benefit of the whole. Through the repetition or replication of the individual unit the whole is transformed into the singular. It becomes the aesthetic of mass production. It is not sufficient for an object to look machine made for it to indicate that it is mass produced. It must also exist in quantity. The ideals of mass production sat comfortably with the modernist movement. The designer Peter Behrens believed that “the artist designer had a profound duty to supervise and encourage the production of sober, machine-made forms which would in turn foster a stable, orderly society sharing common values.”

Ray Batchelor sees them sharing the ideals of rationality and uniformity.

In this aesthetic there is no room for the original (as Walter Benjamin sees it) because the original is nothing but the prototype. Thereafter all repetitions are a recurrence of what has gone before with each act being unique in its own time and space. The original is the design, the idea for the multiple. Perhaps in a museum somewhere Henry Ford’s very first Model T to come off the assembly line is displayed as the original vehicle that all others were copied from. This is a romantic concept that might be artificially presented as the original for sentimental reasons. With such an icon as the first car to ever come off an assembly line, society might see a need to ensure its preservation for posterity.

26 Batchelor, Ray; Henry Ford, Mass Production Modernism and Design; Manchester University Press; Manchester England; 1994; p. 95

27 Walter Benjamin asserted that the “aura” of the original, the authenticity of the work of art, cannot be present in reproductions. He said; “even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.” The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction; Art in Theory; Harrison and Wood, Blackwell Pub.; Oxford U.K.; 1992; pp. 512 - 520
encoding it with the status of holy relic, a beginning that can be seen, touched, smelled, real. But in critical terms it would really only be a token that stands for the idea of the original. The Model T was constantly undergoing minor improvements. Although the changes were slight, each car was consistently sold as the Model T, not as a copy. Ford instilled the value of the original in every car he sold. How could one be more original than another? In these terms, each Model T owns the ‘aura’ of the original, each owns “the unique value of the authentic”.

The same can be said for any mass produced object. There is no original plastic Coke bottle from which all others are copied.

To the modernist movement, Ford’s ideals of rationality and uniformity went a long way towards instilling the values of the Modern perspective in ordinary people. Homogenisation of the masses through attitude and living conditions was seen as the way towards creating a stable society. The Modernists looked forward to a culture uncluttered with emotional attachments to objects and a nostalgia for the past; valuing instead a future with new materials and new ideas. In his book *Apocalypse Postponed*, Umberto Eco sees mass culture as anti-culture. He argues that to conceive of a culture that is shared and tailored to suit everyone contradicts the notion of culture as a solitary, aristocratic

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Fig. 12; The Model T Ford, 1927  
Fig. 13; George Ebling, _Moulding Headlamp Shells_. Ford Motor Company, 1932 – 34

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38 Benjamin, Walter; p. 514.
cultivation of an inner life that opposes the vulgarity of the crowd. Rather than mass culture being a passing phenomena, he fears that it is the mark of an irretrievable loss.  

The combination of mass production and modernism represents a shift from the solitary to the mass, from the personal to the public. We moved from studio based workshops where work was performed by skilled tradesmen to mechanized industry where factory production lines focused on speed, accuracy, continuity and economy and machines replaced human skill. Workers on the production line facilitated the flow of production through the machinery and generally performed unskilled functions. The products of the assembly line were identical with no personal individuality. Cultural attitudes moved away from the desire to own lasting unique objects to a desire for cheap easily replaceable items (ultimately the idea was to democratize style and make it available for everyone not just those who could afford it.)

Modernist rationality was one of the main forces driving mass production. Simplifying and streamlining production and design went hand-in-hand. Ornament gave way to the grid. Narrative and the single point perspective gave way to the universality of all-over compositions. The individual mark of the hand was replaced by universal design.

This project borrows from modernism the idea of paring down to basic essentials - the repetition of single units - but infuses it with intensive human involvement. Each individual unit created in this project is handled and manually manipulated, making each one unique. At the same time each unit represents a repeated motif which, in the mass aesthetic, is again absorbed by the whole.

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29 Eco, Umberto; *Apocalypse Postponed*; Indiana University Press; USA; 1994; p.17.
PART V

Labour and the Living Machine

In mass production the power of the labourer as an individual is subsumed into the overall production mechanism of the assembly line. Karl Marx described the transformation of the labourer as a living accessory of the machine, the means whereby its action can take place.\textsuperscript{30} Having been a labourer on an assembly line, I can testify that this is not merely an abstract concept. The feeling of being an active part of the machinery like a flesh and blood cog was real. Although I was aware of my unskilled position which offered nothing more to the production process than the facilitation of the flow of activity, the sense of being part of something (physically large) and powerful was, for me anyway, palpable and in a strange way (briefly) fulfilling.

Unlike the machinery components of the factory I worked in, the human components were regularly rotated to avoid breakdown. Some stations I worked required more than a single (human) action thereby removing me, by degrees, slightly further away from the flow of mechanised activity. Here I was responsible for a bigger chunk of the action, a wider step in the production process. I developed a sense of being a pivot between order and disorder as material passed from one side of me to the other, more than just a cog. All jobs required repetitive movement and so a symbiotic relationship developed between my rhythmic actions and the pulse of the machinery. I was absorbed or integrated into the functions of the machine.

The lack of variation and unrelenting repetition without corresponding mental input initiates the notion of the worker turning into a machine. The nature of repetitive work has often been described as mechanical. Unlike a machine,
though, a human being is prone to fatigue and boredom which introduces the possibilities of error and change. Therefore a more apt description would be that the actions of the worker become machine-like.

In my own artwork the tasks are broken down to the simplest functions to facilitate speed. No matter how absorbed I become in the repetitive task at hand there is always a point where I slow down a little or pause to think of something or even change tasks. When working on an assembly line there isn’t the choice to alter one’s actions. The labour is regulated by the machine and the worker must surrender to the system.

Walter Gropius cited Behrens, along with Ruskin and Morris, as attempting to establish a creative union between Art and industry. The development of a new generation of talented individuals who were trained in industry and handicraft were hampered, he believed, by a firmly established academy approach to design which was far too removed from life. He declared, in an early Bauhaus text that “So long [however] as machine economy remains an end in itself rather than a means of freeing the intellect from the burden of mechanical labour, the individual will remain enslaved and society will remain disordered.” “Mechanised work is lifeless,” he writes, “proper only to the lifeless machine.”

Charlie Chaplin’s 1936 film Modern Times had his character, “The Little Tramp,” become physically absorbed into the workings of the machinery after a day’s work on the assembly line. Unlike me, “The Little Tramp” went mad; his body twitching like a machine to the bewilderment of his fellow workers who seemed more resigned to their circumstances. He danced around spasmodically until he was caught on the conveyer belt and continued to tighten imaginary nuts and bolts with his spanner as he was dragged through the gigantic cogs and pulleys of the machine. Chaplin sought to highlight the unnatural conditions of

factory work. John Ruskin extended his criticism to industrial manufacture entirely by arguing that the idea was wholly inconsistent with Christian faith and that the human touch provided evidence of life.32

The fear of our humanity being altered as a consequence of mechanisation by turning us into robots (or going mad doing the same repetitive thing for eight hours or more a day) and equally of machinery or technology taking over the world as conscious beings has been a scenario constantly revisited. It is most potent as a theme in film where we share this collective fear. Most depictions are frightening. Metropolis, Invasion of the Body Snatchers, The Stepford Wives, Terminator, Blade Runner and The Matrix have a sense of the apocalyptic about them. All are connected to a fear of the material gaining control over humanity. As technology continues to advance at a rate that we fear we cannot keep up with, we will always have a need to express our concerns critically and artistically.

32 Schafter, Debra; p.17
Fig. 15; Fritz Lang, *Metropolis*. 1927

Fig. 16; Don Siegel, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. 1956

Fig. 17; Ridley Scott, *Blade Runner*. 1982

Fig. 18; Bryan Forbes, *The Stepford Wives*. 1974

Fig. 19; Wachowski, *The Matrix Reloaded*. 2003
I came closest to the experience of living labour that is, working like a machine on a production line, when working on Store during 2005. In its making I was the sole worker, responsible for every step of the process. There was no machinery involved in the fabrication. Production was staggered over almost a year but in the final six weeks the workload was constant to the exclusion of all else. During this time I experienced the mental and physical rhythms that the body slips into when committed to a repetitive task. In his novel Rivethead, Ben Hamper described his position on the assembly line as a job that kept him forever in motion. He called it “the absurdity of the regimen”. The regimen I worked within was self-imposed, it was not governed by another’s schedule. Perpetual motion made the task easier for me to complete.

The need to get the job done demanded a rigid schedule of work and breaking this schedule caused havoc. The gap in the process created time to think about which stage the work was at and how I felt physically. It made me lose track of what I was doing so I learned to keep a concise record of progress. It made me aware of aches and pains and fatigue and at times I was reluctant to begin again. The beauty of the labour lay in maintaining the momentum - a rhythm of bodily movement which facilitated progress without the need for conscious intervention.

33 Strictly speaking, living labour describes a human who works alongside a machine, an assembler on the assembly line.
34 Hamper, Ben; Rivethead - tales from the assembly line; Fourth Estate Ltd; 1992; p 92
PART VI

The Sorcerer’s Apprentice

The works in this submission allude to an over-production of the artefact, the scale indicating a barely controlled containment of the objects.

Walt Disney’s 1950’s cartoon depiction of the *Sorcerer’s Apprentice* helps to explain this sense of over-production. The apprentice (Mickey Mouse) used the sorcerer’s magic hat, which was strictly forbidden, to enchant the mop to carry buckets of water to fill a tub thereby making his task of cleaning the floor easier. He then cloned the mop, halving the time to complete the job. His lack of skills in the spell department, however, prevented him from being able to end the enchantment and so, the mops kept dividing like reproductive cells. The buckets of water kept coming and soon there was an army of mops and a great flood. Only the intervention of an angry sorcerer, woken from sleep, could restore control to the mayhem and allay disaster. The drama was enhanced by the addition of tumultuous music which heightened the viewer’s tension as the mops in their hundreds relentlessly pounded the scene with water and the young apprentice with terror.

Fig. 20; Walt Disney, *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice*, 1940
The apprentice, having set the process in motion through casting of the spell, had no control over the action. The "machinery" had grown in power with each replication of the unit (this being the object and its accompanying action). He couldn't halt the spell, he couldn't physically stop the mops from marching and he was beginning to drown in the flooding waters. The mops pursued their tasks with no apparent understanding and oblivious to the creature who had given them life in the first place.

Each mop was identical, appearing with a monotonous regularity and programmed to complete its task without interference. The action occurred rhythmically and in unison like that taking place on an assembly line.

My personal connection with the idea underpinning *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* stems from my laundry hand experience. I recall my training as a catcher at the end of the ironing machine that pressed pillow cases and small surgical cloths. There were perhaps ten different items all of the same size but with different codes. Training consisted of being told to separate the codes. The articles exited the machine with the speed of what seemed like machine gun fire. I did my best but the machine was relentless and I was very quickly drowning under an avalanche of hot little neatly pressed cloths. The machine was stopped, I cleared the mess and the ritual began again only to be repeated with unforgiving regularity. I felt like Lucy in the chocolate factory! After a few days of 'training' I mastered the speed and accuracy needed for production to work smoothly. I learned that I could divide one hand into four separate catchments, in between the fingers, and could feed them with the other. I learned the subtle differences between the items as well as reading the codes swiftly. I also managed the heat better so that I didn't burn so easily. In effect I learned to manage the product so that it didn't control me and I ultimately became an extension of the machine.
One of the first pieces made in this project was a two dimensional arabesque design from ribbons of aluminium. In an attempt to rationalize the work, making it easier to install, I cropped the edges of the overall pattern into a square format and placed it in a frame. The severed sides of the curvilinear pattern pushing up against the frame created a tension that did not exist prior to framing it. It was like I had placed a restraint around a living organic line. The pattern threatened to burst free and spread across the wall in a frenzy of curlicues but was held in place by the frame surrounding it. This tension was the result of my eye wanting to extend the severed ends of the pattern by visually completing the arabesque.

When using architecture to curtail a pattern, the eye expects to stop where the wall stops or the ceiling begins. Clues as to where a work begins and ends relate directly to the space within which it is situated. The ceiling, walls and floor prevent the work going any further thereby giving the viewer the sense that if there were no physical barriers then the work would go on forever.

Fig. 21; This image shows an impression of how the original arabesque was cut down to a square
The scenario was replicated in my own studio where the material accumulated so fast it began to spill out into the hallway. It seemed to be duplicating overnight and each time I entered the room quantities had grown. Until I managed to control some of the material by shaping it into a piece, I felt overwhelmed and did not know where to put my hands. The finished pieces, for me, generate a strong feeling of restraint, holding their place only because I fixed them there.

One of the consequences of working this way – accumulating before making – is that it is often difficult to stop accumulating and so the mountain of material grows even after the work is made. Underlying this habit is a fear of not having enough. I believe that painters suffer a parallel dilemma about when to stop applying paint to the canvas. There is always a voice in my head that tempts me to prepare more material and make the piece bigger.

I believe I am guilty of the condition of ‘Horror Vacui’. Ernst Gombrich describes this as the urge which drives the decorator to go on filling any resultant void. He then goes on to say that perhaps the term ‘Amor Infiniti’, the love of the infinite may be a more fitting description. I agree.

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35 Gombrich, E.H.; Sense of Order; p. 80.
PART VII

What this project is not about ....

1. Recycling

The work I do has often been described as recycling. Reintroducing waste products back into the system generally does come under the banner of recycling. I've always felt uncomfortable with the term primarily because it puts me in the position of doing something honourable, that in some way I was trying to make a difference to the environment. Michael Owen Jones writes about 'recyclia' (the growing tradition of fashioning artefacts from cast-offs, also called folk-recyclia) as bearing the fragments of other sign systems that have been inverted; “For this reason, many view the creations as evidence of a material, if not moral, triumph over the cultural hegemony exerted by the industrial societies that spew mass-produced objects into world markets.”

Frankly, I find that too much responsibility to take on. Besides, if anyone was to scrutinize my process they'd see that quite a lot of my off-cuts go back into landfill because the recyclers won't accept them.

My concern has always been to make the mundane noticeable rather than the waste. Recycling suggests a technological intervention with the core structure of the material, reducing it to a base level from whence a new product is made. The word also alludes to a moral point of view. It brings up the question of responsibility - who's responsible for making the waste? - who's responsible for doing something about it? This is an area I don't wish to explore and I don't think will assist in the development of my research.

Nor does the term re-use fit my practice. Re-use implies a general clean up of the object before putting it back into circulation as it was originally intended –

36 Correl and Polk; The Cast-off Recast. Recycling and the Creative Transformation of mass-produced Objects; UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History; 1999; p 20
second time around. Second hand and tip shops are full of objects that can be reused. The plastic bags we use again and again are an example of re-use.

I came across the term ‘refabrication’ in the book *The Cast-off Recast* edited by Correll and Polk. It is the term I believe best suits my studio practice. Refabrication, implies reworking the object into a different guise where the component parts of the object may be separated and altered but the base material remains fundamentally intact. Refabrication does not necessarily make use of plant machinery but allows for manual fabrication. The object is returned from waste and fashioned into a different object. The maker responds to the material and the form in a creative and imaginative way.

Fig. 24; Ostrich made from tin cans, Africa. Fig. 25; Jessie Tarula, Devil made from car mufflers, mid – 1990s.

2. Obsession

Another term that has often been used to describe my work practice has been ‘obsessive’. I can understand why someone would come to that conclusion. The nature of repetitive work can be regular and monotonous. Coupled with the scale of the work and a committed ambition to maintain regular and continuous

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37 Correll and Polk: p 20
production it would appear to some to be an obsessive practice. Obsession is the complete domination of the mind by one idea. It alludes to a complete loss of control to that idea. Obsession can’t be helped. I have never identified my work as obsessive; I have always considered myself committed to an idea rather than obsessed by it.

It has become apparent to me that artists, who work in a repetitive manner, particularly when the work involves intense hand work, are referred to as obsessive. It is a convenient label that is too often uttered lightly perhaps because, to do the same, in the mind of the critic, would mean an altered state of mind that sits somewhere between eccentricity and madness. Although this sounds extreme I do believe that the word is used with some degree of wonder or endearment, however, for me it sounds almost dismissive, describing an uncontrolled state of mind rather than artistic intent.

When asked by Dennis Cooper about how his work is often referred to as obsessive the artist Tom Friedman replied that he thought artists often obsess over their work. However, he said that; “Obsessive is a convenient word to describe one aspect of my work, but it doesn’t take into account the reasons behind the acts that are characterized as obsessive, so it’s a failed approach.”

Another artist who objects to the word obsessive is Liza Lou. Her room size sculptures are made entirely of tiny glass beads. Her Kitchen, complete with floor, walls, cabinet work, furniture and even water flowing from the tap in the sink took her five years to complete. First impressions give rise to the word obsessive. In contrast to the notion of obsession Peter Schjeldahl describes the work of Kitchen as a sum of choices, bristling with determination with no evidence of pathological predictability. He describes obsession as one damned thing over and over whereas Kitchen is one damned thing after another.

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38 Collins English Dictionary
39 Interview with Dennis Cooper; Tom Friedman; Phaidon Books; London; 2001; p. 39
40 Schjeldahl, Peter; Splendor in the grass. Liza Lou and the cultivation of beauty; Smart Art Press; California; 1997; p.13
Yayoi Kusama, on the other hand, is the artist who confidently exploits the concept of obsession in her work. Described by Joanna Mendelssohn as the emotionally bereft child looking for comfort in obsessive behaviour, Kusama’s work could be described as a celebration of her mental illness. Words like obsession, obliteration and compulsion are often associated with titles of her work. Her environments are so complete with the multiplication of dots, there seems to be no apparent escape. Often appearing in photographs of her installations she becomes a part of the work, covered in dots herself she is engulfed and threatened with obliteration, her frame almost disappearing in the mass of repetition that characterises her environment. It would be folly, however, states Mendelssohn, to describe this artist’s work as therapy. Kusama “is fully aware of the visual impact of her small body in apparently infinite spaces.”

Fig. 28: Yayoi Kusama, Dot’s Obsession - New Century, 2000

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11 Mendelssohn, Joanna: *Yayoi Kusama*; Artlink; vol 22: no 2; June 2002; p. 89
12 Ibid
PART VIII

Summary

This research explores the aesthetic of mass as a display of order that functions not only with the rigidity of formal arrangements but also with the informality of instinctual organization. It presents artworks as the organized assembly of multiple identical units. The sequential reading of such displays is similar to repeat surface pattern which is also formed from multiple units. As such, different avenues of investigation are drawn upon as foundations for the work. Traditional forms of pattern making, dance, public spectacles and accidental arrangements, as mass aesthetics, collectively influence the studio experiments.

In a series of individual works/installations a connection is established between mass production and modernism where the individual becomes assimilated into the universal whole. Mass production produces identical objects in bulk. Singularity, their value is usually brief and meaningless beyond immediate use. United as a large body the meaning alters to include the impact of mass as it reveals uniformity and evidence of overproduction. As viewers we are aware of the machine fabrication required to produce significant quantities of objects and accept that there are no variations in the manufacture. We observe the mass as an uninterrupted field with no focal point.

The role of the maker is questionable in the mass aesthetic. The machine-like qualities of the uniform mass deny the mark of the individual. On the assembly line the worker contributes to the production as an adjunct to the machinery. This research looks at the maker as the primary labour behind the production. Notions of repetition and uniformity are extracted from the mass produced object and replicated in the making process. Repetitious tasks are performed manually that not only refer to mechanical processes but also to the monotony
of vernacular crafts. The actions are accumulated and stored in the body of the maker as both knowledge and muscle memory.

I am interested in how we apply the act of crafting to an art practice that has no technical language. The development of new technical know-how is acquired through the slow process of trial and error, through learning about the material, and is generally supported by a strong commitment to making it work. The handcrafting of an object allows for the development and refinement of skills whilst at the same time allowing for alterations in the intent of the work. It showcases the thought processes of the artist and the hand of the maker. The contrast between the distinct machine fabrication of the object and the hand fabrication of its transformation creates a tension that is added to by the object’s apparent lack of value. The degree of attention that is focused on such material is not normally expected but has become current practice in contemporary art.

This project brings together some of the elements that go unnoticed in our daily living, combinations of banal elements, that allow them to be seen in a different way. The mass aesthetic is so entrenched in our visual expectation of order that we notice it only when unexpected elements attract our attention or when we have a direct interest in the individual object. The relationship between discreet objects and pattern is established through repetition and order which allows us to observe the mass in the same terms as decorative surface pattern. Hand fabrication methods are applied to refuse material provoking interest in both the material and the application of craft. It allows the viewer to have a different experience of ordinary objects, to enter into an aesthetic engagement with objects that are transient and normally considered waste.
CHAPTER 2

CONTEXT

PART I

Something out of Nothing: Tom Friedman

Tom Friedman looks for an aesthetic that "re-situates how one looks at something, not looking from the standpoint of participating, or fulfilling a type of dialogue, but as the personal bare bones essentials of making something out of nothing." His practice often involves the close introspection of an object or an act which culminates in many hours spent extracting a particular characteristic. These objects are always mundane, dismissed as nothing of value; soap, pubic hair, an eraser, a picture in a magazine, a pencil, a sharpener. The acts associated with the objects are also mundane; getting hair stuck in soap, erasing a picture, sharpening a pencil. The outcome, however, produces objects that demand attention because in their simplicity they present the extraordinary. In Untitled, 1990, the bar of soap is imbedded with pubic hairs laid in a perfect spiral radiating out from the centre. 11 x 22 x .005 appears to be a blank piece of paper but is instead a 'Playboy' centrefold which has been completely erased. Untitled, 1992, is simply a pencil shaving, but a uniquely unbroken one. Friedman uses direct processes as precisely as he can, transforming familiar things into strangely unfamiliar ones. He starts with 'nothing' from which he creates 'something'.

43 Cooper, Dennis; Tom Friedman; p.39
In the “mass” aesthetic we lose focus on the individual unit and we gain a sense of order, abundance, and the illusion of infinity. There appears to be no beginning and no end. Nothing indicates an intention to stop the action therefore production can be imagined as going on forever. The action of the assembly line
which rhythmically churns out unit after unit, replicants of each other, is
imitated by the movement of the eye as it scans across the orderly arrangement
of Tom Friedman's piece Untitled 1993. It is not necessary to know that this is a
piece made of cheap plastic drinking cups inserted one inside the other in order
to respond to it. The cups are not obvious. What we see is a white ring resting
on the floor with ridges evenly spaced around its circumference. The ridges
manipulate our gaze to follow from one to the next and so on around the
circumference of the ring. Unless we take a pen and mark the ridge we started
at, we are given no visual clue to where the piece begins and where it ends.

![Image of Untitled 1993 by Tom Friedman]

Fig. 32; Tom Friedman, Untitled, 1993

This piece is approximately one metre in diameter and nine centimetres high. It
rests quietly on the floor, a perfect white ring of undisclosed material. It could
be a length of hose expertly joined together. There are no visible signs of how it
is made. It looks like it was extruded from an impossible machine. An
impossible circle. A minimal Zen circle. Does knowing it to be an assemblage
of disposable plastic cups change our reading of it? It must, because once we
know they are cups we know they are individual objects. We can imagine them
separating, unsheathing from one another. We can imagine their full length
contained within the full length of the next, and so on. We can only see the rims
of the cups but once we become aware of the material we also become aware that what we supposed was a light-weight and hollow hose is actually dense and full of matter.

![Image of cups and hose]

Fig. 33; Tom Friedman, *Untitled* (detail), 1993

The rim segments of the cups are so evenly spaced and so close together that they could be part of each other, separate from their bodies. Even once we know the truth we can still imagine a ridged hose filled with stacked rimless cups threaded into its hollowness. We see it either as a filled hose or as a ring of cups and can switch quickly from one to the other but we cannot see both at the same time. (It is difficult to see the ring as a hollow hose once we become aware of the cups.) This is a type of illusion that Gombrich discusses in order to explain how complex our perceptive capabilities are and how illusions function.

The fact that we cannot experience alternative readings at the same time can be perplexing, creating ambiguity that cannot be explained easily. In the case of the ring of cups it is our knowledge of the reality and our ability to play with this

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knowledge that provides the illusion and therefore extends the reading of the work without detracting from its reading as a whole.

Fig. 34: Joseph Jastrow's duck/rabbit illusion, 1888. Gombrich uses this figure as an example of how we can experience two readings of the same image but we cannot perceive them at the same time. We can switch from seeing the rabbit to the duck rapidly but not simultaneously.

Gombrich also states that our process of perception is based on the rhythm of schema and correction.45 We make guesses, about what it is we are looking at, according to previous experiences (schema), and when they don't make sense we try again (correction). We have seen ridged hoses in the forms of irrigation tubing and vacuum cleaner hoses and apply those memories to the ring of cups. When we come up against an obstacle that doesn't fit with our image of the hose - the closed circle - we search for another familiar reading that will bring us closer to the truth. The ring of cups is an example of how a very familiar object, presented to us in an unfamiliar form, becomes ambiguous in the light of its own simplicity and challenges our sense of perception.

Tom Friedman has taken a quantity of very mundane objects, the kind whose use expectancy extends to a drink and that we can see every time we go to the supermarket or get take-away coffee, and transformed them into an object that demands our attention. He has not altered the integrity of the material in any way nor has he camouflaged their identity. The cups remain cups. What he has done is exploited the stacking property of the plastic cups and assembled them

45 Gombrich: Art and Illusion; p. 231
as if in storage, ready for use. By forming them into a circle rather than in upright columns he has distanced the cups from their normal context. The new arrangement is the making that brings about their 'wholeness'. It has become a reductive geometric form that is closely aligned with Minimalism - an aesthetic that Friedman says he relies on in the same way he relies on the whole art context. We, as spectators, by trying to comprehend what it is we are looking at, bring other associations to our understanding of the piece that initially causes us to see the work as something other than a series of plastic cups.

PART II

Trash and Treasure: Donna Marcus

Donna Marcus is concerned with the transformation of the everyday into something unique. She works tightly within the confines of the domestic sphere, plundering op-shops and recycle bins for relics of the recent past - mass produced aluminium kitchenware. Veterans of the assembly lines of post World War Two these utensils served in the working kitchens of Australia in all their shiny aluminium glory until they became dulled and dented from use. Ultimately, they were superseded by, perhaps, the more up-market display of affluence - stainless steel (and an arguably unsuccessful attempt by plastic to overtake our cooking practice when microwave ovens first came into use). The perfect material for the modern world, this pure element (aluminium) can be recycled indefinitely. From pots and pans to Spitfires and back again these humble utensils were surely destined for reconstituted glory in a newly mechanised guise of the future. Marcus has other ideas.

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46 Cooper, Dennis; Tom Friedman; p. 39
47 Predominantly attracted to aluminium ware, Marcus also makes work with plastic microwave products.
The objects Marcus uses in her assemblages share a collective identity without necessarily being identical. Separate pieces are devoted to vegetable steamers, coloured lids or teapots. She makes no attempt to hide slight differences in the forms or signs of wear and tear. These blemishes are merely trophies of use, scars that provide proof of their individual histories, in direct contrast with the homogenous perfection that obliterates their individuality on the factory assembly line.

Marcus works openly between flat wall pieces (Tripe, 1997), 3D sculpture (Fullerene -, 2002) and installation (Mother and Child, 1997). Tripe is a wall piece measuring 146 x 115 x 15cm. The individual components are aluminium steamers. A trio of them would sit neatly inside a pot, a different vegetable in each, an efficient way to prepare your three veg to go with your meat. Most of us are familiar with the utensils Marcus uses. We remember them from our past, some may still be in use. Alison Kubler writes in the exhibition catalogue “99% Pure Aluminium”, “When these discarded humble saucepans and steamers are fashioned into bricolage sculptures that pay homage to post-minimalism, they function as vehicles for memory” and “[their success] trades precisely on our familiarity with the individual elements.”

The components are arranged in a half drop repeat pattern with a number of translations apparent as well. Viewing the work through squinted eyes the details disappear and the complex geometry becomes clearer, similar to a

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48 Kubler, Alison; 99% Pure Aluminium; Exhibition Catalogue; Institute of Modern Art; Brisbane; 2003; p. 9
49 Ibid; p. 17
strange industrial wallpaper reminiscent of Moorish tiles. Seeing a detail of the work rather than the whole piece removes the edges from view. There is nothing about the pattern to indicate that the edges are close by. It holds the promise of spreading across the surface forever, stopping only when reaching an obstruction. I want to know if I should pick up one piece will the whole pattern lift fluidly like fabric or rigidly like board.

![Fig. 37; Donna Marcus, Tripe (detail), 1997](image1)

This tactile piece full of scraches, dents, bumps and holes triggers memories of touch. The familiar sensation of touching cold metal, matt not shiny, the tiny raised edges of holes that catch on the ridges of your fingertips and the smooth rounded corners of the form, each piece small enough to hold in one hand, each piece interesting enough to conjure memories of sneaking off to the sandpit to play. Looking closely, you can see ‘20c’ marked on one of the pieces, evidence of time spent at the op-shop, of the act of foraging.

![Fig. 38; Detail of Tripe showing 20c.](image2)
Many of the pieces are separated by obvious differences – varying numbers of holes, different sized rivets – all of them, however, combine as a whole, a futuristic metallic pattern softened around the edges by human touch. In Brigitta Olubas’s words, the modernist configurations of Marcus’s sculptures “Return us to the familiarity of modernity’s dream of the future as a clean and efficient place to be.”

There is an urgency for Marcus in collecting the aluminium ware following a noticeable change in the pattern of collection over five years. Where once she found many coloured anodized lids, the majority now are silver. Ultimately the supply will all but dry up given that these objects are no longer made. This is crucial for Marcus as her work requires multiples of the same object. Her dream of finding an old factory with boxes of unsold vegetable steamers which will enable her to make a really big piece of *Tripe* attests to this. There comes a point in the process of working with mass when one begins to fantasise about finding the ‘motherload’. For me, this is fuelled not only by the threat of discontinued supply but also by a desire to increase the scale. It becomes a race against time whereby the work towards realizing the finished piece builds up such a momentum that supply cannot keep up with demand. Hence, dreams of the ‘motherload’.

Marcus has created a tension between the hand crafted single object and the industrial identity of her chosen material (which carries with it the notions of replication, uniformity, anonymity and machine fabrication). The viewer is aware of the individual units and the time taken in both acquiring the objects and making the finished piece. Unlike the objects Marcus employs, Friedman’s objects were never meant to hang around long enough to develop a history. He harnesses the immediate nature of mass produced disposable material. These

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50 Olubas, Brigitta; *99% Pure Aluminium*; p. 20
51 The ‘motherload’ is a quantity of items found in one place, large enough to produce a substantial piece of work without the need to continue foraging. This can replace many hours of work which would otherwise increase the material supply relatively slowly. It is the dream of all long-term foragers.
artists have invited us to slow down and really look at these objects that normally evade our notice let alone scrutiny. The success of these pieces, I believe, lies in the artists' intimate knowledge of their materials and the pleasure of making. They address the multiple with links to the modernist aesthetic but with a much stronger connection to the individual human condition than to the mass experience. Their work is about what can be done with ordinary things.

PART III

Accumulation: Anthony Cragg & Leonardo Drew

Most of the production process at the Central Linen Service was apparent and one could see the sequential transformation of the material. The bulk of wet linen decreased steadily as workers shook out and fed each item into the ironers. The linen exited the other end of the machine pressed and folded where they were then stacked onto trolleys. Each full trolley was parked against the loading dock wall ready to go on the trucks. Throughout the working day one could see the gradual filling of the trolleys and the increasing numbers of laden trolleys assembled against the wall. The accumulation of end product was progressive and openly visible. One could see how the work progressed and gain a sense of how your own labour contributed to the process.

A breaking down of elements within the making process of this project reveal the notion of accumulation. From the early beginnings of collecting material to the final stages of assembly the process has a 'building blocks' approach to the end result which, inversely, is evidence of the accumulative process. Material is gathered over a period of time, and continues throughout the project, until a sufficient amount to begin a work with has been stockpiled. The acquisition of new technical skills and problem solving strategies expand gradually and are
stored as knowledge that can be brought to each successive work. The making process is broken down into incremental steps where the bulk of one task is carried out— for instance, rough cutting before the next fine trimming. Finally, the physical consequences of the labour are also accumulative wherein the body repeats an action often enough for muscles to operate on memory as well as overuse of an action causing muscle ache and general fatigue.

This method of working brings several benefits to the project. Gradual accumulation allows me to be in control of the process, as mentioned previously. Collecting the material personally allows for chance finds and, because it needs to be washed, begins the transformative process earlier than at the fabrication stage. Direct contact with each individual object occurs throughout the process helping me to develop an understanding of the material, what it’s capable of and how to extract its ‘talent’.

Anthony Cragg alludes to the value of accumulation in his work practice. In his early years he worked in a foundry where they made parts for electrical motors. He claims that he found the process with the materials “incredibly exciting”. Later, when he went back to Art School he brought the experience of the foundry with him; “I started to work with material using processes like knotting lengths of string for three weeks until I had a mass of knotted string to work with”.

The transformation of the string into a different object with unique properties can be considered the ‘pre-fabrication’ – the practice of processing material into a new substance that can be worked with. In other words Anthony Cragg could describe the material he used as ‘lengths of knotted string’ rather than ‘string’. In a similar way I would say that Ophidia, fig. 41, is made from Coke bottle necks rather than Coke bottles. This presupposes a primary step in the fabrication process that implies an accumulation of material.

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52 Cragg, Anthony: Anthony Cragg; Cantz Verlag; Germany; 1998; p. 65.
Accumulation plays a role in the work of Leonardo Drew. He adopts an extremely committed work ethic in his making process and the accumulation of time and labour assist in the articulation of the intent of his work. The self-imposed rigidity of his process is physical and repetitive. Although he focuses on the human labourer rather than the machine I am interested in the lengths he goes to in order to communicate his intention.

I was initially drawn to the aesthetic of Drew’s work. In particular, *Number 25*, is a large scale work and is based on the grid. The orderly blocks are stacked on top of one another to form a wall of monolithic proportions. The blocks are made of a white material that appears to be textile of some kind that has been laid down in horizontal layers. The appearance is reminiscent, for me, of piles of sheets stacked on a shelf. The edges are rough and uneven but appear soft. The material is, in fact, baled cotton. Once the material is recognized the aesthetic immediately translates as a store of cotton bales resting in a warehouse awaiting transportation. Their destiny, we imagine, will be a textile factory where their substance will be refined to a fine textile. All this information, a completed narrative, is gleaned from our tactile understanding of the material and its arrangement.

This work, however, is not merely an assembly of cotton bales. Drew acquired old mattresses, removed the cotton stuffing and returned them to a prefabricated state as simulated bales. The narrative is now altered to a deeper level of meaning. The first assessment was based on the tactile information received from the surface of the image. There was a reason why Drew did not simply acquire fresh bales of cotton. Now, with an understanding of how the piece was made it is impossible to see it for its aesthetic value alone. I now understand that time and labour went into the making of the piece.
In stacking the bales into a grid Drew built a wall that Thomas McEvilley says operates as both obstruction and challenge; “The menial labour that excludes African-Americans from full participation in the life of the culture around them is a wall that not only blocks their way but, ironically, was built by their own labour.” What I first perceived as an artwork focused on material and order was instead an historical performance of labour retold as a “for-itself activity”. Through his own labour Drew is paying homage to the struggle of the black African-American slaves who worked the cotton fields for their ‘owners’. He remembers their labour through the physically hard work of building this wall of cotton bales.

New bales would be devoid of this meaning of labour. The futility of returning old mattresses to their raw state echoes the work the slaves put into the cotton field for someone else’s gain. Drew works sixteen hour days for three months on each piece of work. In a sense, finding the raw material in a mattress conveys how far removed modern society, and he as an African-American is from the conditions of the slave and the type of labour endured in the cotton plantation.

53 McEvilley, Thomas; Sculpture in the Age of Doubt; Allworth Press; N.Y; 1999; p. 330.
54 Ibid
Evidence of the accumulation of the artist’s time and effort is evident in *Number 25* once the link is made to his intent.

**PART IV**

**Installation**

An outcome of the accumulative aspects of this project is a desire to immerse myself in it, to sink my mind and body into the bulk of it. One of the attractions that Islamic tiling holds for me is the imaginative exercise of how it would feel to stand inside a mosque completely lined with mosaics. I imagine I would feel engulfed by the pattern like floating in space surrounded by stars. As the research developed into sculptural forms and then installation I have been able to explore the capacity to engage with my work on such an immersive level.

![Image of Winter prayer hall of the Shah Mosque, Isfahan](image)

*Fig. 40; Winter prayer hall of the Shah Mosque, Isfahan*

I found something close to what this feeling of immersion means to me when reading Susan Stewart’s narratives of the gigantic in *On Longing* in which she describes how the gigantic transforms the body into the miniature, the miniature becomes contained and the gigantic becomes container. Here, entering the space that the mass occupies, surrounding myself by the mass, I become contained...
and the work becomes the container. Stewart defines the gigantic as the origin of public and natural history, becoming a metaphor for the environment or landscape. Installation therefore becomes an immediate environment, a landscape. As we move through the landscape incrementally we can know it only partially and we have no control over it. This sense of being enveloped by the gigantic, by the bulk, unable to gain knowledge of its entirety, is my expectation of immersion. Contrary to seeing this as a threat, I instead find it liberating. As the bulk cannot be contained by the body then the body can surrender itself to the bulk, it can relinquish control.

As the work progressed away from the wall it removed any reading of the work as a surface. Although there was never intended to be a fixed viewpoint with the surface pattern, the viewer always read the work whilst standing in front of it and perhaps moving parallel to the two dimensional plane. Ophidia, having no 'front' or 'back' allows the viewer to walk around it and view it from all angles. As a free standing object it exists in the same space as the viewer and by moving around it the viewer can get a direct sense of its size, its density, its surface and its stability in relation to their own body. In other words the viewer can relate to it as a real object in real space and is able to gain a direct sense of bulk.
After resolving *Ophidita*, I took a step closer to the reading of the mass as container. This had to occur in a literal sense where the viewer can become surrounded on all sides by the mass and not gain an external perspective at all. George Alexander describes installation as a literal, vernacular space replacing the illusionistic – it replaces transcendent space for real space. In this sense the viewer’s role as observer transforms to that of participant as he/she enters the inner space of the work. Unable to step back from the work and only imagining the space within, the viewer experiences the space directly, as Susan Stewart puts it, as if being in the landscape rather than looking down upon it.

Edward Colless looks at installation from the point of view of placement of the material. He asks the question “if the procedures of installation are those of placement and arrangement then what makes it an Art, something beyond a mere routine or technique utilized by store-men and packers?” His answer is that Installation Art requires the pragmatic ability to identify artistic problems concerning expression or style or symbolic significance, and will demand the discovery of appropriate solutions. In my research I am actively investigating the routines utilized by store-men and packers. At an important point in the research I investigated how the aesthetics of a store-room (as an aesthetic of mass) can be communicated through installation. My intention was to build an enclosed environment full of multiple objects that alluded to storage. I wanted primarily to experience that environment for myself – I have my own experiences to bring to it - and secondly so that viewers might experience it. The work was *Store* and was installed at Inflight Gallery during July 2005 (see fig. 101).

Claire Bishop writes that; “the history of Installation Art’s relationship to the viewer is underpinned by two ideas. The first of these is the idea of ‘activating’

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56 Stewart, Susan; *On Longing;* Duke University Press; U.S.A.; 1993; pp 70 - 103

57 Colless, Edward; *Install X 4;* Exhibition catalogue essay; Plimsoll Gallery Hobart; 1994
the viewing subject, and the second is that of de-centring. Bishop goes on to say; “Instead of representing texture, space, light and so on, Installation Art presents these elements directly for us to experience. This introduces an emphasis on sensory immediacy, on physical participation (the viewer must walk into and around the work), and on a heightened awareness of other visitors who become part of the piece.” It was important to gauge how visitors responded to the space in order to see how Store worked as an installation.

PART V

Transforming mass: Tom Friedman & Do-Ho Suh

The focus of this research is not only to alter the value of the individual object but it attempts to alter its mass value as well. The single object itself is deconstructed to a point where it is totally meaningless as form and function. Its altered meaning lies in the repetition of its parts, its mass value. Tom Friedman’s Untitled, 1999, Dollar bills is an example of such a transformation from separate units into a single new object. He has taken thirty six U.S. dollar bills and after cutting them up into identical squares he put them back together in a grid to make one large dollar bill. But, of course, that’s not what it is. It has the correct dimensions, a rectangle, and the images are placed in the correct positions. You wonder if perhaps you squint your eyes the pieces will all come together and focus into a recognisable dollar bill. They can’t. This is a completely new object altogether. The thirty six one dollar bills are broken down into thirty six equal parts each making a total of one thousand, two hundred and ninety six squares. All those individual units, identical apart from the print on their surface, combine to form a single mass, a whole. There are

58 Bishop, Claire; Installation Art, A Critical History; Tate Publishing; London; 2005; p. 11
59 Ibid.
still thirty six dollar bills present in the mass but we don't see them separately, we see them as a single object.

Fig. 42; Tom Friedman, Untitled, 1999, Dollar bills.

The object that we see in Do-Ho Suh's Some/One, 2001, appears to be a suit of armour. The surface, clearly metallic and mesh like alludes to a medieval style of body protection worn in battle. The stylized form indicates a traditional design, perhaps Korean and perhaps ceremonial. With sleeves outstretched like arms and suspended above the floor Some/One holds a presence that exudes a significance of great importance, perhaps even heroic, protective and paternal, Christ-like. The scale of the piece is commanding, standing about two metres tall. With the front panels of the garment opened the piece is large enough for the viewer to enter into and stand in the cavity of the open cape. The length of the garment is exaggerated to drape across the floor as far as the edges of the room where the floor meets the wall and even beyond the confines of the room. It switches from human adornment to a surface on the architectural plane.
The surface appears to be a traditional suit of metallic armour with small discs of metal combining to form a seamless but flexible protective barrier. The small discs of metal are in fact standard issue U.S. military dog-tags. The artist acquired large collections of them from various sources. Once again a first impression of surface and patterning is made deeper by recognition of material. The name of the piece — *Some/One* — indicates its dual representation of singular and mass at the same time. With each dog-tag representing an individual soldier the combination as mass becomes representative of an army or perhaps a body of souls subjugated by the machine of war. Either way the individual is lost to the greater entity. The extension of the piece beyond the confines of the room adds to the sense of scale. An inability to view the whole and only gain partial knowledge of the work dwarfs the viewer in the presence of the whole.
The dog-tags are arranged like fish scales forming a seamless fabric, at once delicate and yet impenetrable. In themselves their value lies not in the material, which is a cheap metal, but in their meaning. Representing individual people with thoughts and feelings, past and future lives, the meaning behind the many hundreds of dog-tags weigh the work down with the responsibility of care. The exaggerated scale of the coat possibly indicates the scale of guardianship the owner of the garment has over the mass of individuals. Conversely it may be an equal expectation of the countless individuals to watch over the whole whether it is representative of a leader, an army, a nation or humanity.

This patterning creates a continuous unbroken surface allowing for the reading of a singular object. Although unwearable it gives the illusion of wearability and an ideal connection to the body. At a deeper level of meaning the scale is prohibitive suggesting the enormity and difficulty of the responsibility of care.

Do-Ho Suh has worked previously with the notion of mass and its contrast to the individual. The repetitive units he employs directly represent the human individual whether through the suggestion of garments as in *High School Uniform* or miniature figurines as in *Blue Green Bridge* and *Public Figures.*
He denies, though, the interpretation of the individual disappearing into anonymity. Instead, he believes that anonymity doesn’t really exist suggesting it is a convenient way to describe a certain situation. He wants to recognize the individual. In *Public Figures* Do-Ho Suh identifies the role that many individuals play in supporting the notion of ‘heroes’ as commonly represented by public statues. The plinth, that normally supports an individual statue, is instead supported by hundreds of small figures, their stance – one leg forward – braces their bodies for the weight of the enormous stone plinth they hold up with their arms. Among the figures he created six different ethnicities, both male and female. They strain under the great bulk of the plinth but remain united.

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*Sollins, Susan; *Art 21*; Harry M. Abrams Inc; New York; 2003; p.48*
PART VI

Handcrafting the machine-made: Fiona Hall, Ricky Swallow & Andy Warhol

An outcome of this project has been an awareness of the tension between the handmade and the machine-made. The material used was mass produced in a factory but the process of making the work in this submission does not involve the use of machinery at all. Occasionally borrowing from traditional craft practices, such as sewing and mosaic work, the methods employed have always been manual fabrication and, because there is no store of craft knowledge associated with the material, have generally been developed along the way as
needs arose. The widespread use of found objects in creative practice has generated an instinctive application of old and new techniques creating a dialogue between mass production and discreet hand fabrication that can be seen in both contemporary and 'folk' art practices.

Philip Watkins argues that the found object could extend to the structure of its making, as a found process. He asserts that the artist has abdicated a specialist technical profession. He describes artists who use found practices as applied conceptualists who borrow know-how from other professions enabling them to address broader social issues about the regulation of our time and labour and where the artist fits into this.⁶¹

Current practice has seen the introduction of the everyday object transformed as a vehicle for the articulation of ideas. Fiona Hall and Ricky Swallow employ found everyday objects in their Art transforming them through labour intensive techniques. Each artist works almost obsessively on the object to achieve a result that goes beyond the maintenance of its identity to exaggerate it.

Fiona Hall’s extensive application of handcraft techniques on common objects have been deliberate attempts to explore wider political issues through the domestic vernacular. Julie Ewington points out that almost everything that Hall uses is from everyday life or disregarded domestic practices. She describes it as the stuff of amateur craft and popular hobbies.⁶² In Medicine Bundle for the Non-Born Child, 1994, Hall has knitted fine strips of Coca Cola cans into a baby’s layette. An incongruous combination of material and method it is at the same time both humorous and horrifying.

⁶¹ Watkins, Philip; Group Material; Artlink; vol 24; no 2; p. 84
⁶² Ewington, Julie; Fiona Hall; Piper Press; Armadale, Australia; 2005; p. 126
Ricky Swallow has adopted traditional craft techniques in his most recent body of work. *Come Together* 2002 is a life size representation of a bean-bag hand carved from wood. Nestled in its folds is the replica of a human skull. Contrast lies between the subject matter and the artisanship. Swallow has not simply dabbled in wood carving, he has adopted a disciplined approach spending many isolated hours perfecting the craft. As a technical skill adopted for the purpose of this body of work, Damiano Bertoli aligns it with domestic pastimes; “Swallow redeems backyard woodcarving, which traditionally exists on an axis between humility and futility – a private ongoing project without glory or any sense of public appreciation – and marries it to the old world of European figurative sculpture.”

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63 Bertoli, Damiano; *The Sounds of Silence*; Artlink; vol 25; no 1; p. 13
Swallow has taken a natural material and with the application of traditional craft techniques laboriously carved out an object, the subject of which is generally associated with the banal, where one would normally expect a subject of greater value. The object is singular and unique in contrast to its representation of the common and machine made.

By way of contrast, the work of Andy Warhol is famously non-crafted and anti-individual. Going so far as to call his studio “The Factory” he attempted to eliminate evidence of his hand on the work he produced. A favourite practice of Warhol’s was silk-screening. Every step in the process was able to be made by a machine. He was happy not to have to use his hands at all. He thought it would be great if more people took up silk-screening so that no-one would know if his pictures were his or somebody else's. He painted this way because he wanted to be machine-like saying: “I feel that whatever I do and do machine-like is what I want to do.” Warhol thought everybody should be a machine.

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65 Ibid: p. 732
Warhol did not always approach his work in this way. His first series of *Campbell’s Soup Cans* 1961-2, of which there were thirty two identical canvases, were all painted by hand. Care was taken to be as precise as possible with the only differences being the names of the different soups on the labels. Even though the paintings were executed by hand, however, the intent was to reproduce mechanical actions as convincingly as possible. John Coplans believes that the laborious process involved in these paintings suggested to Warhol the idea of a mechanical means of producing the work.66 Encapsulating the notion of the mechanical through repetition, Warhol concentrated his efforts on serials of screen prints based on the popular culture of the time including subjects appearing regularly in the mass media such as coke bottles and screen idols. Warhol’s repeated images replicated the type of media saturation of a subject that manages to anaesthetize the spectator with over exposure. Coplans believes that: “In these images Warhol proves that machines and mechanical processes are no worse or better than the men who use them; the one merely reflects the other.”67 Edward-Lucie Smith states that, through his choice of subject matter; “Warhol seems concerned to anaesthetise our reaction to what is

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66 Coplans, John: *Serial Imagery*: Pasadena Art Museum; California: 1968; p. 130
67 Coplans: p. 130
put in front of us. As serials do, he destroys the impact of the individual as it dissolves into copies of itself.

Gombrich reminds us that the individual means indivisible. In the repeated images the individual becomes a mere stereotype. He explains that the repeated image tempts us to concentrate on single elements, rather than scrutinize the individual, which then fuse into a new pattern. As we look at a Marilyn 1962 series we can see how this technique is employed, particularly when Warhol also chooses to highlight features such as eye shadow and lips.

Warhol depicts people as commodities as much as he does objects. As media idols they are consumed by the public in the same way as the soup cans, coke bottles and ultimately his paintings are. They are all the same.

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68 Lucie-Smith, Edward; *Movements in Art since 1945*; third edition; Thames and Hudson: London; 1984; p. 162
69 Gombrich, E.H.; *Sense of Order*; p 151
70 Other artists that have further connections to the project but may not have been referred to in this exegesis are Rosalie Gascoigne, Bridget Riley, Louise Paramoor, Montien Boonma, Fred Tomaselli, Maria Fernanda Cardoso, Wim Delvoye, Anne Hamilton, Carl Andre, Allan McCollum and Felix Gonzales Torres.
PART VII

Summary

Chapters One and Two outline the evolution of a conceptual framework and a relevant practice in the realization of a series of artworks employing found materials.

This investigation has explored art practices that engage common objects in suites of works that exploit their mass produced origins by presenting them in multiple arrangements. In an attempt to elevate their value, these individual objects have at the same time been rendered invisible through the process of repetition. A new reading of the object is established as a mass, a singular whole, and it is their value as mass that becomes the focus.

Ordinary objects placed out of context confuse our understanding of the material. In these artworks we see no attempt to disguise the objects. Instead the lower value of the objects is exploited to establish both feelings of familiarity and strangeness.

We feel comfortable, as viewers, with the ordinary object and also the aesthetic of the repeated multiple. We recognize the objects taken from daily living and our sense of order immediately connects us to the mass aesthetic through an understanding of how repeat surface pattern works. We respond to the simplicity of the repetition through associations with our own experiences but are still astonished by the overall aesthetic. Even though we may have come across similar arrangements of objects in places like the supermarket we are surprised to see the objects presented in such a way; at the same time the arrangements appear natural and obvious to the nature of the material.
The discussion on Warhol takes us back full circle to the aesthetics of mass and the supermarket shelves. Out of the consumer climate of the 1960's he blurred the distinction between Art and Advertising, producing serials of screen prints based on images of popular consumption. The subjects of his artworks reinforce the confused value of the individual unit in mass consumption, whether it is in retail or the mass media, through the process of repetition and his denial of the mark of the hand in producing the artworks places him theoretically in an equal position to his subjects.

This contrasts with the other artists in this chapter who place a high value on process which independently of the material are often considered ordinary and, in the case of Tom Friedman's process, insignificant. Here, too, familiarity plays a part with the viewer's own experience of vernacular crafts and insignificant actions.

Chapter Three will track the resolution of this body of work bringing together discreet processes and mundane materials in the aesthetic of mass.
CHAPTER 3

HOW THE PROJECT WAS PURSUED

Introduction

The subject of my postgraduate research began as an extension of my Honours project, the basis of which was an exploration of the formal elements of surface pattern. I employed strategies of repetition and the formal structure of the grid as parameters to work within. I investigated how surface patterns were built by repeating a singular motif according to a set of design rules that exist as traditional strategies.

Fig. 52; Golden Fush, 2001

The postgraduate research began with a focus on the direct relationship between surface pattern and architecture. The intention was for the pattern to exist as part
of the structure, not as a separate ornamental element decorating the surface. It was important for the pattern to be worked directly onto the wall, not as a separate object to be attached later.

Islamic tile patterns were a primary source for the research. I was intrigued by the fluid nature of these patterns and the idea that the process - which appeared to be complicated geometry, relied upon tacit knowledge. Here the repeated motif occurs in minute elements and expands into larger configurations.

My attraction to Islamic tiles is not confined to their geometry and scale but also in their function as objects. Throughout the Honours project, even when the focus was on surface pattern and the two dimensional plane, the work existed in real space because of the material. The whole image was of surface pattern but this was built with three dimensional objects. In a similar way to Islamic tiles I used separate material components to build the picture plane.

![Islamic tile pattern](image)

*Fig. 53; Dado frieze in the Hall of the Ambassadors, The Alhambra, Granada, 14th C.*

At the beginning of this project I was interested in the point at which the dominance of pattern overwhelms our senses and destabilises our physical
understanding of the space we occupy with the pattern. I investigated the internal space of surface pattern as a space in a visual state of flux and how that alters our sense of the external space we occupy as viewers.

As the work progressed it became clear that issues central to the research were material, multiplicity and process. In this chapter I will show how, while maintaining the primal rule of repetition, it was the peculiar nature of the material that dictated the pattern rather than the pattern dictating the way the material was used. This opened the practice to materials that previously proved difficult to work with. As the repeat motif simplified down to the multiple object, the focus moved away from the wall allowing the work to support itself and become sculptural. Scale and dimensions grew along with the quantities of material gathered. As a true sense of mass began to take shape, the work progressed to occupying a larger space making it possible to engage with the work as installation.

PART I

Lace work and the two dimensional surface

Islamic mosaic patterns function on several levels. The linear component of the pattern comes from the space between the tiles - the grouting lines (and often, as seen in fig. 53, this happens in reverse where the lines become the dominant tile and the coloured tiles in the spaces between take on the role of negative space). The tiles that provide the shapes between the lines create blocks of colour and form greater patterns. Their combination forms a continuous unbroken surface that follows the contours of the building therefore leading the eye across the surface in a fluid gaze. Like the decorative elements on the facade of the Majolikahaus, mentioned in Chapter One, the pattern serves to unify the surface plane allowing spectators to grasp the unity of the building.
Given the role that grout lines play, I extracted the smallest complete motif I could see and drew it on graph paper. Repeating these over a large area of paper expanded the smaller motif into larger ones which, in turn, became repeated motifs.

Rather than using a tile to then build the pattern – the space between the lines - I used a material to make the lines. This material came in the shape of ribbons cut from aluminium cans which, on their sides, could be curved to follow the lines of the pattern. They were attached, back to back, wherever the lines of the pattern crossed over. Thus, the linear component of the pattern was made becoming a three dimensional relief against the supporting wall. As the viewer tracked the pattern across the two dimensional plane the pattern altered between coloured and silver with pure line perceived only when viewed frontally.

A secondary level of pattern, and surface, appeared between the ribbons. At first understood as negative space these small areas between the ‘lines’ functioned as
tiny catchment areas for reflected colour. When light hounced off the sides of the ribbons it was reflected onto the supporting wall. Whatever colour appeared on the aluminium was reflected as softly coloured light. Silver sides reflected a bright white light. Almost an illusion it hovered precariously, half in the air, half on the wall, wholly dependant on the standpoint of the viewer and the light falling on the surface. This ephemeral layer of the pattern emerged as a by-product of the material. Subsequently it became part of my investigation process to reveal and expose seemingly insubstantial properties of material and different ways of perceiving them.

I began the studio research with many experimental models of patterns using paper as the material. Paper is flexible, inexpensive and quick to shape into a form. I could afford to make many mistakes because the material was not precious. I first spent many hours drawing linear patterns on graph paper and then, by cutting craft paper into ribbons I could curl, fold and join them following the shapes of the patterns I had drawn. After I had made many identical pattern pieces I then joined them together until they made an area large enough to tell if a certain pattern was going to work. Once I knew a pattern was working I could then move on to the preferred material.

Fig. 55; Pen drawing on graph paper, 2003

Fig. 56; Mock-up of pattern with paper ribbons, 2003
The problem I found with this way of working was that by the time I had completed a model the piece was resolved and I had exhausted my enthusiasm for that particular pattern. I discovered that the nature of pattern making was that the combinations were endless and challenging and there was never a design that I could decide on! It was much more exciting to draw up another pattern and make another model. What I had to do was begin making the patterns as final pieces.

Up to this point I had employed the grid as a tool with which to build patterns. It is a logical base for repetition and order. Designing a motif and repeating it along a gridded surface promotes an even and balanced design. Moreover it triggers an understanding of the two dimensional plane. As Rosalind Krauss states when writing about the use of the grid in modern painting; "The grid maps the surface structure of the canvas, it organizes a metaphor for the plane geometry of the field: through its repetition it configures the spread of lateral continuity."71 "Logically speaking" she says "the grid extends, in all directions, to infinity. Any boundaries imposed upon it by a given painting or sculpture, can only be seen – according to this logic – as arbitrary. By virtue of the grid,
the given work of Art is presented as a mere fragment, a tiny piece arbitrarily cropped from an infinitely larger fabric." To this end, repeat surface pattern, with the grid evident as foundation, reinforces our perception of the architectural plane, both as a complete covering and also in isolation.

I became interested in removing the grid and trying different ways to build patterns. As the grid indicated planarity then removing it might alter the reading of the pattern as ornament rather than surface. In his preface to *Ornament, a Modern Perspective* James Trilling introduces ornament as the Art we add to Art. Not *adornment*, it mostly works subliminally, he says, occasionally grasping our attention. As visual texture, Trilling explains, ornament shifts our attention from the building as a whole to deliberately accentuate certain features. Take it away, however, and the form and function of the building (or object) remains intact. But does ornament remain as ornament in isolation? If repetition, symmetry and balance in surface pattern can still suggest planarity in isolation from the architectural surface then the abstracted motif can surely indicate ornament when viewed in isolation.

Arranging the motifs on a central axis with the pattern radiating out from the centre was a starting point. The emphasis remained with repetition and symmetry. The first pieces continued to be based on arabesque patterns using aluminium ribbons as material. I began with a simple organic form, such as a tear drop. With all points of these forms connected to each other the pieces came together as a circle of drop shapes with the first one eventually joining onto the last. Other forms were added gradually to the outer edges increasing the circumference and spreading the pattern outwards.

*Green, White and Red*, 2003, were all made on a central axis. Each individual piece was unique but the trio also functioned as one piece. As the names

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72 Trilling, James; *Ornament, A Modern Perspective;* University of Washington Press, 2003, preface, p. XIII
suggest, each pattern was based on the colours of the cans used. The work was shown in the Entrepot Gallery and gave me the chance to have some early feedback. Though this exhibition of work I learned that I could alter the scale of the work and also include layers or complicate the patterning.

I aimed to build a larger piece that would span at least two metres across the surface. I began by making a large central pattern circle. I then joined six smaller circles around the circumference and completed the piece by filling in the gaps. The result was that it resembled a large lace doily.

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*71 Where the Heart is; Entrepot Gallery; Hunter Street Hobart; March 2003*
The colours, from various blue and green cans, glowed against the wall and responses from people who viewed it were that it resembled a stained glass window or a peacock's tail. I was pleased with the result particularly because of the aesthetic association with lace work which reminded me of the endless varieties of finely crocheted doilies and table cloths that my mother produced. When she saw what I had made she commented that; "we work in the same way" only I don't use fine cotton thread as she does in her work.

![Fig. 63; Small lace motif, Aluminium ribbons, 2003.](image1)

![Fig. 64; Crocheted doily, Annamaria Usmiani, 2000.](image2)

At this point I encountered my first technical problems. So far my main concern was with the aesthetic and I gave little attention to the practicalities of making work that was easy to move, install and store. The Doily, as I shall refer to it, was joined together with paperclips and attached to the wall (canite) with many display pins. It was impossible to move from its position and any attempt to do so caused the paperclips to slip off and the whole work threatened to spring apart. The aluminium had already proven resistant to any form of adhesive. (I tried superglue, double sided car tape, bonding cement and Tarzan Grip to name but a few.) The curve in the aluminium, from its life as a can, had a memory that prevented it from making a flat join. It tended to pull away from the other piece of aluminium and therefore the adhesive had no two surfaces to bond together. Paperclips offered a good but temporary join. They held a few layers of aluminium together but only if I didn't try to move them. I finally found a style of paper fastener that held the aluminium together securely and enabled

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74 From a conversation with my mother, Annamaria Usmiani, December 2003.
me to lift it like a cloth without it springing apart. I had to accept, though, the obvious visibility of the clips and resolve that they were going to be part of the overall aesthetic. I decided it was small compensation for work that would hold together well.

The second problem was the way it was attached to the wall. The pins would not go into a plaster wall easily and difficulties with alignment caused endless adjustments. It was necessary to find a way to make *Daily* a permanent piece that would be easy to hang on any wall. The solution was to build a frame with a canite back board to which I could permanently pin the work. The frame was heavy gauge aluminium which supported the canite and complimented the lace work. I covered the canite with fabric and then painted and sanded it several times to make it as smooth and white as possible so that the colours would reflect well.

The lace work was cut down to fit within the square. I did this with some reluctance because the process of cutting was irreversible and didn't allow for mistakes. It had the feeling of cutting a dress pattern out of expensive fabric. The process was successful however and *Daily* fit inside the frame. I could then lift the whole work up and move it across the room without causing damage.

I should have been happy that I managed to find a sensible solution to a technical problem. I saw it instead as an experiment that had gone wrong. It would ultimately confirm my resolve in placing aesthetics before practicality or perhaps, form before function. The frame was heavy and cumbersome. The carefully painted backing board gathered dust quickly and was impossible to clean between the curls of aluminium. The lace work sat higher than the edges of the frame so that there was little protection on the sides. But most importantly the reading of the pattern had altered. Now contained in a frame, it became an object rather than a surface and read as a painting. The space was internal to the picture plane contained within the confines of the frame and could no longer be
read as universal. I learnt that the patterns had to remain on the wall to maintain an unbroken link with the architectural space.

Apart from seeing what would happen if I removed a section of pattern and put it in a frame, the research continued through expanding my newfound capacity to fasten whole assembled sections of aluminium ribbons together. I was able to arrange the ribbons in more complex and intense patterns. The larger motifs held together well and could be attached to the wall with a few strategically placed pins.

Fig. 65; *Black Death*, 2003

Fig. 66; *Black Death* (detail)
Black Death\textsuperscript{75} was made from multiples of one small unit fastened together to form dense circular motifs and opening the circles to make fan shapes. I arranged these across the wall as a continuous ornament. Symmetry remained in the intimate sections of the pattern but an asymmetrical approach was used in the arrangement of the larger pattern. The cans used were Coca Cola and any variety in black. The reflections on the wall varied between red and bright clear light – the black didn’t seem to leave any reflection. The discreet grouping of the individual colours, however, produced swags of deep red and black sections when viewed from an angle.

The aluminium ribbons proved to be ideally suited to building patterns. Strong, flexible and colourful they could be manipulated as easily as paper. In the search for a similar material that had many of the same characteristics I introduced plastic strips that I found at a disposal store and also coloured pages from old decorator magazines. These materials were a little easier to use than the aluminium. They cut easily with a knife and they responded to various adhesives. Overall the making process was much ‘softer’ than the aluminium which left me with many cuts and scratches. No longer confined to the dimensions of the aluminium can, these new materials left me free to make motifs on a much larger scale. The width and length of the ribbons were greater and consequently the motifs had a larger dimension. I made a palm tree motif which sat inside an ogee shape.

I tested different arrangements in linear and axial patterns with varied backgrounds and in combinations of the white plastic and coloured magazine pages. (Because the magazines were old and rare I decided to photocopy the pages and then laminate them for strength.) The new patterns had a nostalgic feel about them with the larger motifs recalling the bold 1960’s fabric designs

\textsuperscript{75} The name “Black Death” comes from the colloquial term used to identify both Coca Cola and stout. It directly refers to their colour and a humorous opinion of their physical effect on the consumer. The name also doubles as a reference to the ‘rosy’ pattern made by the sores caused by the Bubonic Plague.
such as those created by Marimeko. As a retro feel had entered the work I investigated how bold patterns were used to make a feature in homes from this era and developed the idea of suspending the pattern away from the wall entirely. Moving the plastic motifs off the wall separated them from the surface and enabled them to be viewed as pure pattern. I thought of them as line drawings in space.

Fig. 67; Plastic motifs, 2003

Fig. 68; Magazine print motifs, 2003

Fig. 69; Etruscan Ornament.

Fig. 70; Indian ornaments showing ogee pattern.
PART II

Plastic: Wallflowers

The introduction of new materials to the work was determined by how readily they conformed to the patterns I had drawn. I wanted to be able to extract from the material those properties that were similar to paper and as successful as aluminium. I had often considered using PET bottles because I was attracted to the translucent qualities of the plastic but generally the shapes of the bottles prohibited me from cutting them into useful ribbons – there were no flat sides to work with. I persevered with the plastic bottles as I was drawn to the bases of the bottles which had the shape of a 5 pointed star or flower. This offered the possibility of a ready made motif which needed no manipulation. I wondered if cutting the bases off and placing them side by side would connect the forms and develop a much larger pattern such as that could be seen in Islamic tiling.

![Fig. 71: Base of P.E.T. bottle showing five segments.](image)

The short answer is that they didn’t. What resulted from this experiment though was a strong representation of the mass aesthetic through the assembly of individual units. Laid out en-masse the bases began to communicate abundance and accumulation. Realising the potential of using a material that had eluded me for so long I began collecting P.E.T. bottles in significant quantities. More bases made a bigger surface area and I looked forward to the possibility of covering an entire wall with PET flowers.
Wallflowers was the outcome of this work. Against a window, the flower bases became translucent creating a textured glass effect. The coloured bases were reminiscent of lead light windows. Against a white wall the colours intensified and the clear plastic retained its translucent qualities. The surface of the wall gained an opalescent look with reflections from the plastic combining with the plastic itself sitting directly on the wall.

Fig. 72; Clear P.E.T. bases on a window. Fig. 73; Clear P.E.T. bases on white board.

Fig. 74; Green P.E.T. bases on a window. Fig. 75; Various P.E.T. bases on white board.

As a wall surface it returns to the notion of surface pattern without any connection to the grid or symmetry. Whilst the distribution is spontaneous and random at the time of installation, balance is generated by the multiplicity of similar units. The work is created from irregularly placed units of different sizes and colours, however, predictability operates through the viewer's expectation that all objects in the arrangement are similar and the surface can be scanned with minimal interruption. The viewer can accept minor differences in the units as all are consistently made of translucent plastic and have five 'petals' to their
forms. Our perception functions in the same way when scanning the pattern in Donna Marcus's *Tripe* (fig.38). Not each vegetable steamer is identical but there are enough similarities for us to accept them all as steamers. We are able to view the whole without being challenged by individual differences.

My practice has always been to secure the bulk of a particular material before beginning work on a piece. This practice extends to making once the work begins. For instance, I would make a large number of motifs before assembling them into a pattern. With this in mind I proceeded to collect PET bottles, dissect them and then store the different sections together. In this way the foundations of several different pieces began to grow through the primary act of organization. The focus was on bottle bases to begin with, but this process provided the groundwork for several other pieces. I separated the mid sections of the bottles from the necks and the bases and kept all lids and neck rings. Nothing was discarded.

![Fig. 76; P.E.T. bottle lids.](image1)

![Fig. 77; Plastic rings from necks of bottles.](image2)

The project was beginning to include elements that did not correspond strictly with the original intentions. At the same time, other elements were beginning to dominate. I did not want to exclude the PET bases but I wasn’t exactly making patterns with them. Also, I was enjoying using the magazine pages but in reality they were copies of magazine pages and not the real thing. I felt concerned that I was moving away from using discarded objects by manufacturing my own material. The plastic strips, also, were ambiguous. Their previous use was unknown so, as a material, they provoked no familiarity. The function of
material to the project had suddenly become clear to me. I understood that it wasn’t pattern so much that I was researching but how material can be shaped into patterns. I decided to work only with discarded material that I would collect myself. Where I had previously been shaping the material to conform to established patterns I now allowed the material to dictate the forms.

PART III

‘Drunken Bums’

Earlier projects involved the use of aluminium cans. Out of hundreds of cans I only used the ‘walls’. The tops, where the ring pull is situated, were thrown out as they were damaged by cutting through them. The bases were kept (I affectionately call them ‘Drunken Bums’). They sat idle until I was ready to make a work with them. As I had continued to work with cans into the postgraduate project, the bases kept accumulating. They were an awkward object with no flat surface although they sat neatly inside each other like cups. I wanted to use them as they were without alteration. The concave underside had a linear texture on the aluminium which, in a certain light, reflected strong bands or stripes cutting across the diameter of the circular base. Along the cut edge of the base there remained a band of colour from the print on the can. These two qualities could be exploited but I needed to experiment to find the best way to harness them without altering the material further.
At the time I began to work with this material I was fortunate to gain the use of a large empty studio area which gave me the freedom to work on arrangements that took up large surface areas and allowed me to work without having to worry about being in the way. I trialled several arrangements before settling on one I called “Something Fishy”. This used a half-drop-repeat pattern where the bases lay side-by-side in rows, with each subsequent row overlapping the previous row in a pattern resembling fish scales.

Fig. 81; First test of ‘drunken bums’.

Fig. 82; First test detail.

Fig. 83; Second test of ‘drunken bums’.

Fig. 84; Second test detail.

Fig. 85; Third test ‘drunken bums’.

Fig. 86; Third test detail.
I had first laid the arrangement out on the floor to get an idea of how it would work. Satisfied with how it looked I then wanted the piece to flow down the wall and across the floor without working into the corner. To achieve this I attached a sheet of aluminium to the wall with velcro strips so that it was half on the wall and half on the floor. This achieved a smooth curve instead of a sharp corner. Attaching the bases to the aluminium was going to prove difficult as there was no flat area to apply adhesive to and I also wanted the resulting piece to be flexible. These were not easy things to achieve with sheet metal.
The next difficulty was getting the placements correct. One of the principles of pattern making is accuracy. Without it, the surface is disrupted and the eye is unable to scan the plane fluidly. It also looks messy. Guided by the edges of the aluminium I blue-tacked the bases into position. After the sheet was covered I could see that the rows started off straight but rapidly became crooked. It looked very messy and I realised I had to consider a completely new approach to assembling this piece.

Thinking about the material and why I wanted the finished piece to flow down the wall gave me the answer to the technical issues. I wanted the piece to have the fluid qualities of a fabric similar to Glow Mesh and sequined material. To approach the bases as if they were sequins I would have to sew them onto fabric. I chose heavy duty clear plastic as the support. On this I marked out a grid so the bases could be placed accurately. Each base, after punching a tiny hole in the rim, was sewn onto the plastic using monofilament and following the grid. Each base had the hole positioned differently. This made the reflective stripes shift a fraction of an angle with each row. The angle of each row grew slightly each time and then after eight rows began to move back the other way. It had the effect of a wave curling to the left and then the right, and so on, as the viewer's gaze moved up and down the length of the piece. The coloured rims add small pieces of relief from the greyness of the aluminium.

There's nothing particularly new or exciting about the half-drop-repeat pattern but it managed to capture both the reflected stripes and the coloured edges of the bases at the same time. There were enough bases to cover a one and a half by five metre long area. The width is the same as the width of fabric. As the piece drapes down the wall and across the floor it alludes to textile decoration and has a direct connection to the architecture. The piece is flexible so it behaves just like fabric resting under its own weight across the floor.
Do-Ho Suh used a similar overlapping pattern in *Some/One*. The dog-tags were arranged in a fish-scale pattern that evoked tactile memories of medieval armour. This arrangement has to be precise in order to work. The units must be identical and the placements exact for the illusion of the whole to be activated. The consistent direction of the 'scales' trigger visual cues to scan the work in a down-ways direction rather than up or sideways. As the viewer scans the surface in a sweeping motion flowing down the garment and across the floor they take in the whole piece at once and accept it as fabric or a fabric-like material.
PART IV

Ophidia

As work progressed towards collecting the floral bases of P.E.T. bottles, other sections of the bottles were also accumulating. As mentioned earlier, I organized the storage so that the different types were separated making it easier to quickly see what I had. All mid-sections were stored in bags and, in the beginning, all necks were threaded onto lengths of dowel. Dowel couldn’t contain the fast growing numbers of Coca Cola necks so I started to thread them onto ropes. Once I saw how they looked on the ropes I knew they were already resolved into a piece. As the bottle necks accumulated so did the threaded lengths and soon the necks were draped over door frames like a strange type of vegetation. The shape of the necks created a pronounced organic curve which contrasted with the futuristic, possibly alien appearance of the material.

Fig. 93; Various bottle necks threaded on rope.

As the necks sit neatly inside one another only about two centimetres of rim is exposed. Only the first neck reveals itself for what it really is, distracting the viewer from imaginary projections and pulling him/her back to the reality of the material. The rest of the assembly is visually a string of ambiguous cup-like clear plastic objects. The piece is viewed sequentially, that is, our gaze travels
along the length of the piece segment after segment. Similarly to the way we perceive the grid as a plane we perceive the linear stack as a sequence of units. Anthony Cragg returned to ‘stack’ work frequently. I respond strongly to his *Stacked Crockery* from 1996 were the mass aesthetic is apparent to me in a most pure form.

He said: “Sculptures that are based on strata or stacking provide an opportunity to experience the very substance of material in a primary constructive form. Working with and looking at works that are in some way layered always gives us a feeling of travelling in a foreign medium or of being able to see some hidden aspect of the object. These works also tend to address the fundamental problems concerning the overall form of larger accumulations in space. That is, they start to engage the space that they are in a special dialogue. Basic questions of what it means to be geometric, amorphous or even representational start to arise.”

Fig. 94; Anthony Cragg, *Stacked Crockery*, 1996.

Installing sixteen metres of the large bottle-necks used in *Ophidia* at the University’s Fine Art Gallery during a vacant period revealed much about the

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Crugg, Anthony; *Anthony Cragg*; Cantz Verlag; Germany; 1998; p. 82
qualities of the work. There was enough length to suspend it from the ceiling at one end and wind the rest through itself on the floor. The plastic created an illusion of emanating light. The necks read as a continuous length of segmented clear plastic, a singular object, rather than as a string of individual objects all together in the same place. The piece was named *Ophidia* after I was shown an x-ray image of a snake in a book of wildlife photography that looked remarkably similar to my string of bottle necks. *Ophidia* is the scientific name for the snake genus.

Fig. 95; *Ophidia*, 2004

Fig. 96; *Ophidia* (detail), 2004

Fig. 97; Radiograph of Rat Snake.
A second piece that runs parallel with *Ophidia* is *Curtain*, a piece made from bottle-necks that were sorted apart from Coke-necks (and are primarily from Schweppes bottles). These necks form a more slender funnel than the Coke-necks which fan out at the base. Strung together they form less of a curve and the rims sit more closely together. Where *Ophidia* has an organic, almost skeletal, serpentine look, *Curtain* aligns itself with the industrial aesthetic where the lengths of plastic take on a more tubular form. Suspended in short lengths from floor to ceiling they suggest products of industry hanging in storage or the heavy duty plastic dividers that enclose dangerous areas within workshops. The use of ordinary rope to suspend the strands further connects them to the idea of practicality and storage.

![Fig. 98; Curtain (detail), 2005.](image)

Again, a strong element of this material is its capacity to refract light in such a way as to give the impression that it comes from within. This occurs in all the plastic pieces in this submission. The same effect can be seen in Do-Ho Suh’s *Blue Green Bridge*. Two thousand small plastic figures span a low curved bridge changing colour gradually from blue to green as they cross to the opposite side. The figures are densely packed producing a softly textured surface. The ambient light reflects off the top surface of the figures — the upturned hands. Under this layer the colour of the plastic deepens with the concentration of figures. As the colour changes to green the effect of an internal light is heightened.
Capturing the light coming in from the window, the Anthony Cragg glass sculpture *Pacific*, 1998, appears to be holding intense light close to its core. Like Do-Ho Suh’s *Blue Green Bridge* and *Ophidia* the light bounces off the external extremities of the material and fractures into hundreds of bright white highlights. It gives the work a living presence.

![Fig. 99; Do-Ho Suh, *Blue Green Bridge*, 2000.](image1)

![Fig. 100; Anthony Cragg, *Pacific*, 1998.](image2)

**PART V**

*Store*

In the process of being broken down into three separate parts (not including the lids or neck rings) the bottles were transformed from one discreet object into three. Because the bottle was moulded from one piece of plastic it is natural to see the cut sections as parts of the same object. Watching them accumulate in different corners of my studio I was conscious of their different forms and saw them as objects in their own right. Each piece was seen as new material and not as remnants of the bottles. Even the whole bottle, after washing and de-
labelling, seemed to have taken on new meaning. Devoid of the signs of 'product' and familiar to my touch I experienced the plastic bottles as unique moulded forms.

The mid-sections of the Coca Cola bottles are gently contoured cylinders, curving slightly in and then out again. Evenly spaced ridges run down the length of the form. They can stack easily on top of one another having a narrow rim on one edge that fits snugly into the opposite end of another. I built pillars of them, stacking them in this way as high as they could go before toppling over. This was the final form they would take.

The cylinders needed to be secured together for stability. Several experiments with various glues were all unsuccessful. They generally required too much glue and because the plastic was clear they looked very messy. I eventually developed a method of lacing them together with monofilament. Small holes had to be pierced through the plastic before threading the monofilament through and tying it off at each joint. The monofilament and the plastic formed a comfortable 'synthetic' relationship. The technique was successful and therefore there was no limit to how many cylinders could be attached. Ultimately I determined the length of the pillars by their relationship to my body – I wanted to look up at them - and the height of the room.

As the quantity of pillars grew and piled up against the studio wall they took on the personality of industry. These tall plastic pillars appeared to have been extruded from a machine, components of an elaborate air filter perhaps. They were like any other machine part, ambiguous in isolation and therefore not questioned too deeply. Their transparency allowed for the mass to be seen right through to the bottom layers. The light passing through the pillars made them visually more like moulded forms rather than segmented parts sewn together. Even if the stitching was visible the visual information they gave was as a whole instead of many parts.
As a mass against the wall they were imposing. With a scale that would normally be associated with heaviness the transparency reads as lightweight and delicate. They appear as they are, empty vessels full of nothing but air. I intended that the pillars be free standing so that I could move amongst them creating the feeling of entering the work and being surrounded by it. I had previously visited the idea of storage in *Curtain* and wanted to explore the concept further. Arranging the pillars as an installation in an enclosed room where they could be spread out uniformly in the space would evoke the idea of a storeroom or warehouse. As an internal room with no windows, Inflight Gallery provided me with an appropriate space to install *Store*.

Fig. 101; *Store*, Inflight Gallery, July, 2005.

The project developed an intensity and constriction that was motivated by a deadline. Collection became more difficult as I focused on one brand of bottle and at the same time consumption dropped with the colder winter weather. Twice the distance needed to be covered on collection day to acquire the numbers I needed. At my work station everything before me looked the same and felt the same in my hands. The task felt weighed down with monotony. Because I had no real idea how many pillars would look ‘right’ there was no
foreseeable end to the task. My mind was bored and my body was fatigued. In
order to maintain motivation it was necessary (if not instinctive) to introduce a
new element to the making process.

Making the clear columns became such a familiar process to me that it was
possible to work all day without concentrating on what I was doing. The
memory of what had gone before was programmed into my muscles in an
almost machine like manner and so each piece of plastic that I added to the last
became an imitation of the previous. What was left for my mind to concentrate
on was counting. Counting made me believe the work was advancing.

Introducing diversity through changing the colour of the filament, using
coloured lids and different bottles injected renewed enthusiasm for the work. I
realized that I was essentially changing the concept of the piece, having started
out as identical multiples, but at the same time I thought that the diversion sat
comfortably as a contrast to the mass produced-like fabrication of the clear
plastic pillars.

![Fig. 102, Store showing clear pillars](image1)

![Fig. 103, Store showing variable pillars.](image2)

Each piece in this project exploits various aspects of the material used. The
surface texture or reflective qualities, existing print or the form of the container
is used as a means to exaggerate the object. For example, the mid sections of the
P.E.T. bottles have a variety of interesting shapes. Some have ridges running
vertically, some have dimples around the circumference and some curve in at
the middle like a human waist. Joining these together in tall columns extended
and exaggerated their shapes, forcing the viewer to notice that particular quality. In a mass arrangement the exaggeration was obvious. However, when installing Store, which consisted of many of the columns just described, the inclusion of various textures and surfaces in multiple combinations acted as a distraction from the mass identical ones. The power of the simplified whole was atomised or diluted. In order to exaggerate a material quality I found it necessary to isolate and multiply it both in the individual motif and the whole.

Store was installed in a nine by five metre gallery space with no windows and one entrance. It consisted of approximately 180 pillars each roughly 3 metres in length and constructed from plastic bottles, suspended from the ceiling so that they hung just above the floor. Spaced at 30 centimetre intervals from each other, the viewer was able to walk into the room and amongst the pillars. It was difficult to move amongst them without brushing against them and causing them to swing. Physical engagement with the work allowed for direct contact with the material enabling the participant to take in information about the work, such as the impact of the body on the material, its feel and movement. Different observations of the transparency and reflection of the plastic were made possible by moving amongst the pillars. Because the hanging filled the room evenly it was not possible to step back from the work or view it from any side. The experience of viewing Store was wholly immersive. Viewers entered the inner space of the installation both activating the installation by moving around it and viewing it universally and also being activated by the work in the same way.

In the final installation, the inclusion of coloured or novelty pillars distracted the viewer from the clear pillars. Viewers were more attracted to the novelty and invention than the uniformity of the other. To the viewer the novelty pillars were easier to ‘understand’. Because of the many differences within each pillar and the seemingly less serious nature of the making they came closer to a shared experience of familiarity. They were seen as fun pieces and some viewers spent
time searching for the bottles they may have donated to the work. The more serious concerns about how the installation operated as mass rather than single unit were missed. As a result I believe the installation functioned as two separate works sharing the same space.

A subsequent re-configuration of the piece in the final exhibition will show the clear pillars as a separate work from the novelty ones. Entering the room housing *Store* will allow the viewer to experience the mass as a whole, with no distractions. *Distraction*, on the other hand, assembles all the novelty pillars in a concentrated group. They will hang too close for the viewer to enter the piece. Instead it must be viewed from the outside where the viewer can walk around it and look into the work.

My aim in installing *Store* at Inflight Gallery was to be able to surround myself with the objects I had made. The process of the work was all consuming. I wanted to feel the accumulation of all that work by immersing myself in the bulk of it. The experience of making was a whole body experience. So, too, the experience of seeing the work becomes a whole body experience by sharing the space it occupies. The immersive experience of installation is about being a part of the world we live in. We surround ourselves with the objects of our daily living, moving amongst them, touching them. Merleau Ponty said “...after all, the world is all around me, not in front of me.” He claimed that perception involves the whole body and is not simply a question of vision. Installation allows the whole body to receive information about the work as it similarly receives information daily about the world it inhabits. Merleau - Ponty argues that “the thing is inseparable from a person perceiving it, and can never be actually in itself because it stands at the other end of our gaze or at the terminus of a sensory exploration which invests it with humanity.” Viewer and object

77 Bishop, Claire; *Installation Art. A Critical History*; Tate Publishing; London; 2005; p.50
78 Ibid
then become part of the same system. The work is completed by the presence of the viewer.

PART VI

Try Again

Inside the lids of the PET bottles are small blue plastic discs. Easy to extract, they can be popped out with the point of a knife. Doing this on a large scale is like shelling peas. They are small and although they accumulate in numbers, don’t accumulate in any significant volume. Thousands of lids almost filled a five litre container (so different to the multitudes of garbage bags for the rest of the material!). Small and delicate they sit in the palm of the hand, weightless like a communion wafer. Immersing your hand in the container is like dipping it in water. They slide easily over each other and offer no resistance. The plastic is soft and pliable. It comes in two shades of blue which the light passes through and casts a soft blue shadow. Each disc has a number inscribed on it and occasionally a competition-related message, “Try again”.

Fig. 104, Plastic insert from P.E.T. bottle lid.

Making work from this material had different requirements to the previous work. All other work demanded my whole body in the process – stretching, bending, reaching, lifting, and balancing. The material was bigger and harder needing lots of space. There were sharp edges that I regularly cut myself on. Blades and tin snips, ropes and hooks were workshop tools. This material depended on an intimate technique, it had to be sewn together by hand.
Sewing is closely aligned with handcraft and is a skill I am very familiar with. It is a quiet skill that can be done anywhere. The work can rest in your lap or on the table. It can be transported in small quantities from place to place so you are not tied down to the one location. It is a domestic, pre-industrial practice.

Fig. 105, Motif of plastic inserts sewn together.

To sew the discs I used four-pound monofilament and a fine needle. (At first I used one-pound but it was so fine I could barely see it and certainly could not feel it between my fingers.) Six discs were sewn around one making a ‘flower’ motif. Six of these were then sewn around the edges of another flower making a bigger motif. As the process advanced and the motifs were sewn together a fabric began to emerge. I felt like I was making a quilt. The fabric was soft and delicate. The labour was quiet and gentle. The slow piecing together of small patches, encouraging the edges to meet and binding them with a stitch was an antidote to the ‘chunky and clunky’ work of previous pieces. It was the opposite of the gigantic Store and Ophidia. The progression was one miniature step after another. Susan Stewart places the miniature at the origin of private, individual history.79 Sewing the fabric was close to my personal history of making things. It connects me to my mother.

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79 Stewart, Susan; On Longing; Duke University Press; London; 1993; p 71
Try Again returns full circle to where the project began with surface pattern. The pattern, however, developed out of the material. The material was completely unaltered and the only manipulation was the process of assembly.

PART VII

Support pieces: (not included in the final submission)

1. Well Stacked

I was presented with a large supply of old preserve tins that originated from the site where the Tasmanian School of Art now stands. They had been ‘rolling’ about the old jam factory site for years and eventually settled in a ground floor storage area. I was asked if I could find a place for them when building construction was about to begin. I had looked at these tins previously and was struck by the impression they made stacked up on top of each other. The simplicity of the aesthetic highlighted the geometry of the arrangement and made me keenly aware of the varying surfaces of the tins. It felt good to get a chance to ‘stack’ them somewhere in the Art School!

Fig. 106; Storage of tins at the IXL Jam Factory site.
Initial construction of the wall directly behind the hop press was simply a storage solution and, due to urgency, did not have very much aesthetic intent. The next day I set about deconstructing the wall and rebuilding it in some kind of order. I thought to separate the two dominant shaped tins placing them against separate walls. The result, although pleasingly ordered, was incredibly boring. The wall to the left of the press in particular was far too regimented and the one behind, due to the space being not quite right to accommodate an exact number of tins was neither orderly enough nor haphazard enough. A third and final construction was a slow and considered attempt to give the illusion of spontaneity.

The similar rusting condition of the tins provided an even enough surface that was not broken too easily by difference in tin sizes. In one area I arranged the large tins together as a wall to experiment with the position of the holes rather than the shape of the tins. Against the side wall, however, I was more interested in the complete jumble of sizes and shapes. Once again, the rusty metal unites all the tins aesthetically. They belong to the same ‘family’ group.

Fig. 107; Well Stacked, 2005
Constructing this wall felt like constructing a dry stone wall. Like natural stones each tin was placed where it fitted best. Each lodged tightly in amongst the others and using the existing pillars as brace the wall is secure and will not fall. The end result of this jumbled wall of tins reminds me of a luggage room in an old railway station where brown bags and cases of different shapes and sizes are stacked one on top of another. It appears to have been assembled slowly as new arrivals landed in the area and were carefully stored out of the way making the most economical use of the available space. A suit-case, however, generally has something inside. They contain the temporary lives of travellers. The jam tins are empty. The tins in Christian Boltanski’s *Reserve of the Dead Swiss* 1990, are closed to us. We are left to imagine what may be inside. With photographs of people who are already dead displayed on the front of each tin we assume they contain remnants of the individual lives. As a catalogue of the dead it implies a memorial to a tragic event. It resonates with emotional power. In contrast, the tins in *Well Stacked* are not only empty (we can see this through the open lids) but they were never full in the first place. The factory closed before they were ever put to use.

Fig. 108; Christian Boltanski, *Reserve of the Dead Swiss*, 1990
2. *Machine Made*

*Machine Made* was a commissioned work for the entrance foyer to the IXL Apartments in Evan's Street. The piece was to hang flat against the wall constructed from a supply of tin lids and bases that would have become parts of the preserve tins. Like the tins, they were found on site. This material was originally made on the premises. Sheet metal was imported from England and the Jam Factory had its own machinery to make the tins. This type of manufacture, where the factory outsourced only raw materials and fabricated all their needs on site, was called vertical integration. The lids and bases, like the tins, were abandoned when the factory closed its doors.

Fig. 109; Storage of tin lids at the IXL Jam Factory site.

There were a number of different styles of lids. I chose to use the ones that appeared with circular indentations and others with circular holes pressed out from the centre. They were silver on one side and gold on the other. The lids were cut down to perfect squares so that the circular indentations came just up to the edge. Although essentially new, years of neglect and exposure to the air and water leaks caused the tin to corrode. Many of the lids were still shiny but most had evidence of rust and dirt. Polishing the surface with fine grade steel wool gave the surface a pearly sheen and didn’t remove the rust entirely.

The lids were altered enough to represent pure material rather than functional objects. The work could be read as surface and not an assembly of lids. The grid
arrangement and orderly repetition of parts connected this piece to its factory history.

Fig. 110; *Machine Made*, 2005

PART VIII

Summary

The total body of work in this submission shows the development from the two dimensional planar to sculptural installation. In the gallery, the display of works represents the point where the research ceased being directed by surface pattern and instead was led by the material.

On entering the gallery the viewer is confronted by *Try Again*. It hangs on the wall opposite the door as both a beginning and end to the submission. It
showcases the material in multiple, the labour in the fabrication and the
ornament of the whole as a decorative fabric.

The submission can be viewed first by entering the Store room. The viewer is
immediately immersed in and surrounded by multiplicity and is able to have the
experience of moving through a work and having close bodily contact with the
material. The room is enclosed but there are two exits so the viewer may choose
to enter from either end. The viewer may feel a contrast between the
confinement of Store and the external spaces at either end.

Ophidia stands in the space directly outside Store in front of the window and
taking advantage of the natural light. On the opposite wall Something Fishy
drapes down the wall and across the floor. Evidence of the making is hidden
from the viewer so the focus is on the visual experience of the pattern. Flanking
these two pieces is Wallflowers which covers the wall like a three dimensional
wallpaper. The units were installed individually with display pins inserted
directly into the wall. This piece marks the departure point from surface pattern.
The work is dependant upon the architectural plane however the arrangement of
the units is random. Articulation of the planar surface relies instead on the
similarity of the units and their sequential reading.

Distraction hangs as a discreet sculptural piece with many components.
Suspended from the ceiling in a concentrated group, the columns relate to Store,
however where Store is an installation of identical units, Distraction focuses on
variation. No two columns are identical and many also display variety within
themselves. The vertical assembly of each unit operates as a common element
as does the substance of the material. Unlike Store the viewer is unable to move
among the columns, but is able to look into the work from any point
surrounding the work.
Curtain, similar to Distraction and Store, is suspended from the ceiling in strands. In a linear arrangement they collectively resemble a partition between spaces. Throughout the gallery, lighting has been used to bring out the transparent and reflective qualities of the materials. Like Ophidia, the light seems to be generated from the material in Curtain.

The work placed in other parts of the building represent the initial stages of the project, which focused on pattern, support or backup for the major body of work in the submission.
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

This body of work has found its way to the practice of making do with what we have.\(^{80}\) It has employed neglected and largely invisible elements, drawn from daily living, in the fabrication of the experience of mass. It has demonstrated that the rapid dissemination of visual codes and symbols, so familiar to our culture of consumption, can be reabsorbed as new information and experiences.

The project has investigated the ordered arrangement of mass in different contexts. By drawing upon common elements from a broad and seemingly unrelated variety of cultural examples; choreographed bodies of people, retail, surface pattern and mass production – the research has been able to explore concepts of labour, the mundane, immersion, accumulation, and the conflicting notions of familiarity and strangeness.

This research has taken Gombrich’s statement, that “when the expected happens in our field of vision we cease to attend and the arrangement sinks below the threshold of our awareness”\(^{81}\), as a basis for experimentation. This hypothesis has been explored by deliberately combining mundane and familiar elements that individually sit well within Gombrich’s theory. The amalgamation of these otherwise unnoticed components have resulted in works that provoke the viewer’s attention and question his/her own associations with the material and the aesthetic.

Within each artwork, an expectation of interpretation is established through multiplicity and/or a rigid and formal arrangement of identical units and their associated fabrication. The assumption of an unbroken field of repetition is

\(^{80}\) Bourriaud: Postproduction; Lukas & Sternberg; N.Y.; 2002; p. 17

\(^{81}\) Gombrich, E.H.; Sense of Order; p. 9
provided through the observer’s familiarity with the codes of repeated surface pattern, and his or her own sense of order. Through accurate and balanced organisation the viewer can scan the mass as a whole without interruption. An ability to recall past visual experiences enables the viewer to digest this information quickly and habit forces him/her to assume that the mass will operate in the same way all over. Coupled with a seemingly unchallenging aesthetic, the force of habit then has the viewer seeking variation from the quickly digested visual order.

A recognition of the material and the viewer’s ability to recall the material from daily living allows an engagement with the work on a tactile level that cannot be achieved through reproduction. The presence of the viewer in the same space as the mass triggers responses similar to those experienced by spectators who are present at large cultural gatherings because the objects they are observing are real and not representations. By being able to observe the material in each artwork and how it behaves in real space in response to light and shadow and change of viewpoint, the viewer gains a deeper understanding of the individual units and the human involvement in the making process.

Although generally aware of the outcome of our consumption habits we rarely observe bulk evidence of this. We are more familiar with displays of bulk just prior to consumption at the retail level. Our response to mass at this point is generally associated with desire. Andy Warhol demonstrated our familiarity with mass, at this pre-consumption point, in his multiple images which were largely drawn from advertising. The viewer, here, readily accepts the notion of mass production but is not yet confronted by similar representations of mass consumption. Rather than presenting mass consumption as waste or detritus, the artworks in this submission have refabricated the objects so that they read not as waste but as material that was once used in another way. Associations to consumption cannot be eradicated, nor would it have been my intention.
because the previous use is part of the information and history that the material carries.

This research has caused me to address my own feelings about mass consumption. As I worked through tonnes of waste material, I have had to regularly resituate the project away from concerns about recycling. Nicolas Bourriaud believes that the distinction between production and consumption is no longer necessarily separate. At the point of sale the consumer, he believes, customizes and adapts the product that he or she buys to suit his or her personality or needs. By virtue of obtaining the product we are also part of the production process: “To use an object” he says “is necessarily to interpret it”.82 The object in this phase of use is in “postproduction”.

In the identification of the “masses”, as the body of humanity that mostly benefitted from mass production, Ray Batchelor indicated its ‘resurrection’ as the “consumer” under the umbrella of postmodernism83 and that the logical consequence of mass production was mass consumption.84 Terry Smith declared that mass consumption was the definitive drive of modernity rather than mass production.85

As Bourriaud asserts, these two consequences of industry are part of the same production process. This project has been as much about mass consumption as it has been about mass production. In this concept, of one being part of the same process as the other, the products of both must be one and the same and form a material world that can be sourced, not as raw material but as cultural data to be reinterpreted into new forms. In this way, the products that have been used and

82 Bourriaud, Nicolas; p. 24
83 Batchelor, Ray; Henry Ford. Mass Production Modernism and Design; Manchester University Press; 1994; p. 122
84 Ibid; p. 133
85 Smith, Terry; Making the Modern; University of Chicago Press; Chicago; 1993; p. 19
discarded have been refabricated, as Bourriaud puts it, "as mediums of experience." 86

In this submission repetitive processes have been a means of extending the interpretation of mass produced objects employed in the making of a series of artworks. The distinctly ordinary nature of these objects allows for a familiar reading of the artwork which is at the same time challenged by the different context in which they are presented and by alterations in the form of the material which initially confronts the observer.

This research began with an interest in mass and visual order that led to the exclusive use of mass produced objects in the making of a series of discreet artworks. These artworks represent an exploitation of the multiple, through choice of object and process. Both precise and irregular arrangements of the identical units address the connection between the aesthetics of mass and formal displays of surface pattern.

Through simple but highly labour intensive arrangements, the common object is transformed into a vehicle for the intention of delivering more complex notions of the impact of human involvement in the aesthetic outcomes of industry and the mass aesthetic. A continuation of this research sees a growing emphasis on employing vernacular making practices in a continued involvement with discarded products of industry and mass consumption.

86 Bourriaud; p. 32
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Stewart, Susan; *On Longing*; Duke University Press; U.S.A.; 1993;

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Vasarely, Victor; *Vasarely 2*; Second printing; Basler Druck-und Verlagsanstalt; Basel; 1971.

Waters, John; *Serious Playboys*; Parkett; No. 64; 2002; pp. 78 – 83.


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Commissions

1998    Foyer for MPSD – 13th floor 188 Collins Street, Detour Design, Hobart, Tasmania
2005    Foyer for Evans Street IXL Apartments

Committees

Committee member for Plimsoll Gallery
Member of Contemporary Art Services Tasmania (CAST)

Reviews

2002  "Pattern as Subject", Philip Watkins, Artlink, vol 22, no 2
2005  "A real bottler", Joerg Andersch,

Grants

2005  NAVA (National Association for the Visual Arts Ltd) Visual and Craft Artists’ Grant Scheme