Fiona Hall
Wrong Way Time
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Cover images: Wrong Way Time 2012–15 (detail)
The Australia Council for the Arts is delighted to present Fiona Hall: Wrong Way Time at the 56th International Art Exhibition, la Biennale di Venezia.

For over sixty years Australia has celebrated our nation’s contemporary visual arts at the Venice Biennale. This most prestigious and critical international forum provides Australian artists with a unique opportunity to exhibit their work and to raise the profile of Australian visual arts.

Australia is a culturally ambitious nation. Our culture is unique and is deeply shaped by more than 70,000 years of continuous Indigenous story-telling. It also reflects the settlement of Australia across two centuries by people from around the world. We are a diverse community of identities, faiths, individual differences and pursuits. As a nation we draw strength from this diversity and use it to expand the dimensions of our creativity.

We see 2015 as an especially exciting year for Australia and one that reflects our cultural ambition in the visual arts. Fiona Hall is one of Australia’s leading contemporary artists and her exhibition is the first to be presented in the new Australian Pavilion, the newest permanent pavilion in the historic Giardini della Biennale and a significant work of architecture. The pavilion will enable Australian artists to realise their creative vision for years to come, as they claim the space for exhibitions as yet unimagined. It will give visibility not just to those artists selected to exhibit work but also, through the strong representation of our visual culture, to all our artists and the institutions and individuals that train and nurture them.

Australia’s participation at Venice is made possible through the enthusiastic support of many individuals who contribute to the project in a myriad of ways. Our national community of supporters have been inspired by the leadership of the 2013 and 2015 Australian Commissioner, Simon Mordant AM. We extend our sincere gratitude to Simon for his unlimited energy and personal commitment to promoting Australian art to the world. We acknowledge the work and dedication of our exhibition curator, Linda Michael, whose experience and close collaboration with Fiona Hall has resulted in a truly mesmerising exhibition.

The Australia Council is pleased to acknowledge the Commonwealth Government of Australia, the Attorney-General and Minister for the Arts, Senator the Hon George Brandis QC, and the generous support and invaluable contribution of our many partners in making this project a reality.

As Chair of the Australia Council, I thank and acknowledge the role of the Council’s Venice team, led by Elaine Chia, and offer sincere congratulations and appreciation to Fiona for her passionate and creative vision in realising this ambitious project.

Rupert Myer AM
Chair, Australia Council for the Arts

Welcome

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Chair, Australia Council for the Arts
I am honoured to introduce the work of Fiona Hall AO at the 56th International Art Exhibition, la Biennale di Venezia.

It is hard to imagine an artist more fitting than Fiona Hall to inaugurate Australia’s new pavilion.

Wrong Way Time is a deeply immersive installation bringing together a multitude of works from her prolific practice. The idiosyncrasies of human nature, coupled with Fiona Hall’s ongoing engagement with the environment and things ‘counter and strange’, underlie a multi-layered examination of intersecting concerns. The audience is enveloped in a minefield where the beautiful and grotesque merge in a poignant display of highly charged, emotive objects. Fiona draws visitors in through the allure of her meticulously crafted work, an enticement that sits in uneasy tension with the disturbing truths the exhibition conveys.

Throughout her career, Fiona Hall has grappled with some of the most complex issues facing society. Her art encourages a re-examination of consumerist behaviour and trends shaping our consciousness. Her interdisciplinary practice confronts environmental degradation, capitalism and political conflict, among other critical topics, and links them together in a range of works that evoke humanity’s deep-seated concern over the state of contemporary life. A significant presentation of Fiona’s practice has never been more relevant as these issues transcend borders and further embed themselves into our daily lives.

I acknowledge and thank Linda Michael, the curator of the exhibition, who has worked closely with Fiona Hall on the development of this extraordinary project. Linda’s thoughtful approach and curatorial expertise in exploring and presenting the themes and trajectories present in Fiona’s work provides us with a fascinating framework in which to experience the exhibition. I also thank Linda for her work on the exhibition catalogue in both curatorial and editorial capacities, Dr David Hansen for his insightful essay, and the Tjanpi Desert Weavers for their wonderful contribution to the catalogue.

Australia’s representation at the Venice Biennale would not be possible without our many supporters and I would like to acknowledge the substantial support from our Sponsors, Partners, state government agencies and donors. Sincere thanks to our Major Partner, The Balnaves Foundation, for their ongoing commitment to Australia’s representation at the Venice Biennale, Thanks also to our Supporting Partners: Anita Luca Belgiorno-Nettis Foundation, Arts NSW, Arts Queensland, Arts South Australia, Arts Victoria, Collider, Department of Culture and the Arts WA, ERCO, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Macquarie Group Foundation, Maddocks, The University of Melbourne and White Rabbit Gallery. It has been a wonderful privilege for me to undertake the role of Commissioner and I have been most fortunate to have the support of Professor Charles Green as Deputy Commissioner. I am also deeply grateful for the generosity, contribution, commitment and advocacy of all members of the Commissioner’s Council—Susan Armitage, Hamish Balnaves, Anita Belgiorno-Nettis, Dr Paul Eliadis, Adrian Fini OAM, Mark Henry, Roslyn Oxley OAM, Lisa Paulsen, and Nicholas Tobias.

This project would not be possible without our individual donors—our Champions. The Venice Biennale Champions share a passion for Australian art and a commitment to supporting our artists in Australia and internationally. Thank you.

We acknowledge the team at la Biennale di Venezia, in particular President Paolo Baratta and Manuela Luca-Dazio, Executive Manager, Visual Arts and Architecture Department, for their valued assistance in ensuring the success of Australia’s presence in Venice.

My sincere thanks to the Australia Council for the Arts for their leadership and management of Australia’s involvement at the Venice Biennale, in particular, to Rupert Myer AM, Tony Grybowski, Elaine Chia, and the project team. Working with you has been a privilege.

Finally, I thank my wife Catriona—it has been her continued support, counsel and encouragement that has enabled me to pursue this wonderful project with energy and passion.

I congratulate Fiona Hall and everyone involved in presenting Wrong Way Time at the 56th International Art Exhibition, la Biennale di Venezia.

Simon Mordant AM
Commissioner for Australia, Venice Biennale 2015
In her ambitious installation for the Venice Biennale, Wrong Way Time, Fiona Hall brings together hundreds of disparate elements which find alignments and create tensions around three intersecting concerns: global politics, world finances, and the environment. Like many of us, Fiona sees these as failed states, as ‘a minefield of madness, badness, sadness, in equal measure’, stretching beyond the foreseeable future. The ideas that underpin her work accord with those of writers in many fields who say anthropocentrism is coming to an end, who see nature as a nexus of references or an ‘ecology of objects’, and draw on so-called primitive beliefs in animism, the agency of non-living things, and sympathetic magic. Fiona’s lifelong passion for the natural environment can be felt intensely in works that respond to our persistent role in its demise, or to the perilous state of various species. Her work is one of many hoarse canaries in the mine. It is a corrective against mindless confidence in war and economic rationalism, or the denial of human agency in climate mutations that supports, at the time of this exhibition, an ‘Australian political strategy of voluntary sleepwalking toward catastrophe’. Increasingly, its underlying message is as described by writer David Hansen: ‘that the planet Earth is going to hell in a handbasket, whipped and prodded by the apocalyptic monsters of ignorance, greed and self-interest’. Fiona’s seemingly random conjunction of things in a wunderkammer-like installation appeals to our human impulse to make connections and see relationships, or perhaps to a paranoia born of the deep uncertainty and fear of our times. Yet despite the prevalent darkness—the gallery and cabinets are as black as her subject—her exhibition is fundamentally life-affirming, its own vitality in perverse distinction to the subjects it ranges across, which provide rich pickings for Fiona’s extraordinary transformation of materials, images, and objects.

The dynamism of the installation comes from two forces at odds with each other. The first is a product of Fiona’s curiosity and engagement with the present moment: her wish to explore the complexity and cruelty and terror of the world as it is thrust into daily consciousness—a world that is now global, wherever we live and however superficially we understand specific local situations. This exhibition is Fiona’s response to her times, to the litany of war news, stories about terrorism, climate change, extinctions, environmental pillage, collapsing markets, and so on. Everything is grist to her mill.

The second registers an essentially very simple thing: her deep love of the world and all its wonder and variety and magic, a fundamental animism. The inherent challenge of the first to someone deeply versed in nature is the
meaning of Wrong Way Time. Yet it is a challenge more than a verdict, as there is so much life here, indeed a profusion of creative riches that is hard to reconcile with the counting of the dead.

Fiona’s work is therefore a chronicle of life in all its intricacy and diversity. Despite its professed agendas, it is not really message art or political art but a practice absorbed in the condition of living on this planet. Her outlook is tragicomic, a secular, even anarchic, vision of heaven and hell. It is not surprising that she loves the work of Dante, Blake, and Bosch, as well as Aboriginal, Oceanic, and African art, which imagine or emerge from complete worldviews and are not as confined in their focus as much contemporary art. There are echoes of this encyclopaedic approach in The Whole Earth Catalog, the counterculture bible of the late sixties and early seventies, with its ecological, scientific, do-it-yourself approach to creating a more just society, one in which Fiona had been deeply schooled. Her art absorbs and reflects multiple currents from the world around her: what she hears or sees on various media, learns through conversation and research, or observes, touches, or hears in her daily rounds—from the minutiae of life in the garden to the geometry of constellations. As Julie Ewington writes: ‘In the tensions between macrocosm and microcosm lies the charge of Fiona’s work as an artist: making sense of now.’

Although the expression ‘wrong way time’ suggests a pessimistic outlook—a ‘now’ wrenched from the flow of time—Fiona’s approach is typically allegorical and alchemical, one that perceives the fundamental unity of good and evil, and therefore the potential for transformation. She can see constructive potential where one might see decay, or order where others fear chaos, likely gleaned from her understanding of natural cycles. Her piece of coal, for example, supports a diamantine creation with the same carbon substrate; her burnt cabinets are exquisitely illuminated. As Gregory O’Brien writes: ‘Her work gathers and hoards darkness and aye, as it does translucence, bearing in mind that darkness has its fecundity just as it does translucence, bearing in mind that darkness has its fecundity just as the greeneest of days has its rot.’ (Though her reformist passions are clear she doesn’t believe that art can change the world and wonders if she might make just beautiful things in the manner of Sri Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa, whose exquisite Garden Pavilion on his country estate Lunuganga, in which she has worked on several visits, was built in response to atrocities committed in his country.)

Yet Wrong Way Time seems to register an irreversible tipping point, such as scientists have warned has already passed with global warming, or economists in relation to unconscionable inequities. The exhibition certainly registers the fear we have, in its volatile offerings, its ritualistic repetitions, its surrealistic excess. It cannot contain enough stuff to ward off death or emptiness, or divert us with mimetic skill or satiric wit. Hers is a gallows humour.

Natura and our relationship to it is the abiding theme of Fiona Hall’s practice, its subject and its inspiration. Mimesis is its primary mode, fuelling the endless production of similarity, and cycles of growth and decay. If, as anthropologist Michael Taussig proposes, the mimetic faculty is ‘the nature that culture uses to create a second nature’, then Fiona is its master. Her earliest works enacted a double mimesis, using photography to represent nature drawn by culture. She has since rivalled the facility of photography in three dimensions, creating life-like natural and human forms out of soap, banknotes, uniforms, videotape, aluminium cans, plumbing tubes, cardboard—she can seemingly make anything out of anything. These ‘copies’ do not rely on trickery or deception—we can see the artifice—nor are they in any way naturalist or pictorial. Though abstracted, they have a fundamental verisimilitude based on acute observation, and the very energy of their making somehow inhere in the object and alerts us to the wonders of the original. Fiona’s aim is that ‘you look at the work and you think of the wonder of nature rather than pressures on the environment.’ Yet it is hard to imagine looking at a bird’s nest in quite the same way after seeing hers in Tender, even though hers are mere ‘copies’ constructed from banknotes—perhaps because her objects reveal, in this case very literally, that the very act of representing is inextricable from the painful destruction of nature. She is so attuned to this process that she can recognise when images or objects reveal the layered histories that tie nature to culture, a mimetic quality that she also picks up in language, often using punning or onomatopoetic titles.

The found driftwood pieces in Manuhiri (Travellers) (pages 91–94), for example, chosen by Fiona for their resemblance to living creatures, revealed a mimetic capacities. Conversely—or in parallel—Tender is a collection of more than eighty nests Fiona made from shredded US dollar bills, accurately replicating a great variety of avian constructions at a time when habitats have disappeared or are threatened by logging and development. The beautiful range of forms emerges from her research in ornithology collections; as she says, ‘you can’t just make a fictional idea of a nest’. Her work makes us attentive to real nests—her mimesis is extraordinary, but not building is normal for birds. The empty nests, the valueless money, and the title converge to question what our society wishes to nurture and what we are prepared to lose (see further on page 45).

For Manuhiri (Travellers), Fiona collected the driftwood—pine and poplar, manuka and kanuka, and many other species—from the Waipau River on the east coast of the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand, where she regularly holidays. Before pastoralists cleared the region from the 1880s onwards, the river’s catchment area was eighty per cent forest, and despite replantings it remains highly degraded, with erosion problems, runoff from agricultural chemicals, and a massive build-up of silt. It is one of the world’s most sedimented rivers, and Fiona noticed a ‘staggering’ amount of debris after heavy rain. From this bounty, guzzled and spat out by the river (wai means ‘water’ and apu ‘to cram into the mouth, gorge, glut, gobble up, wolf down’), Fiona has selected pieces that resemble living creatures, a poetic allusion to those lost as the result of the same process that brought the driftwood into being. She draws out their metaphorical or transfigurative potential—they possess animal spirit as well as evidential force.

The collection is a kind of abstract bestiary: some pieces have the simplicity and
grandeur of Cycladic sculptures. Their incomplete and lopsided features lend a vulnerability of expression. Some even seem to reach out for connection. Here, as Baltrusaitis wrote of ‘pictorial stones’:

We are at the heart of the world of the visionaries, the surrealists, a super-natural, disturbed world brusquely revealed in an actuality of nature. Today’s masters have not done better, even haunted as they are by the same play of paradox and surprise. Here we have geometry and abstraction decomposing and recomposing the shapes of life, forms pure in and of themselves.11

No less than the driftwood, the sculpted creatures from the adjacent display Kuka Irititja (Animals from Another Time) (pages 95, 97, 99–101) are those of the imagination. For this collaborative project, Fiona and twelve women from the Tjapangka Desert Weavers fashioned extinct and endangered creatures—and the odd foral or familiar animal—out of native desert grasses and materials including strips of camouflage fabric (see the artist statements, pages 49–54). All the artists had a history of making animal forms from materials at hand. The women collected grasses, while Fiona supplied contemporary British and Australian military uniforms to incorporate in the sculptures, in acknowledgement of the loss and displacement suffered by the Aboriginal women under colonial and subsequent regimes—including that arising from the secret British nuclear bombing on their lands in Maralinga in the 1950s. Interestingly, ‘camouflage’ derives from a French word that during the First World War replaced the use of the word ‘mimicry’ by naturalists such as Darwin. The women’s quick uptake of the camouflage material, aside from responding to its numerous contemporary uses, reveals a close attention to and observation of animal behaviour—including the human, militarised variety. They understand mimicry and know to judge, and play with, appearances. Fiona had been schooled with the postmodern aphorism ‘the map is not the territory’ but, as her work reveals, believes otherwise—like the Aboriginal women, she grasps the truth and magic of surfaces.12

Everything represents something else; there is no ground. For Fiona, ‘the pressures on the environment are very much linked with global finance, and camouflage is a pattern stolen from nature commandeered into warfare. The crossover is what makes the exhibition; it’s that nexus of things.’13 Here, as elsewhere in the exhibition, systems of description are overlaid on one another, enmeshing us within webs of connection.

On the way to the Tjapangka artist camp Fiona had been introduced—via a child’s painting of a naughty classmate—to Mamu, the local devilish figure that appears in numerous guises in Pitjantjatjara culture. Like Satan, Mamu instils fear or caution, and it as seductive as it is scary. When the nuclear tests were carried out at Maralinga, the elders attributed the black smoke to the Mamu. In several of Fiona’s sculptures this personification of evil appears with characteristic vitality, attended by the endangered creatures: a quoll atop a burnt dried-milk tin morphs into a toothy Mamu; and a frog jumps on a wild, feathery Mamu with a gaping mouth. The impact of white-man’s food or nuclear testing on the environment is felt by the animals, the animals they know—fierce, hungry, and on the lookout.

Kuka Irititja (Animals from Another Time) and Manuhiri (Travellers), among others, register the impact of colonisation and capitalism on a natural environment. Fiona is simultaneously a collector–scientist (on the side of culture, objectivity, rationality) and an artist–animist (on the side of nature, subjectivity, intuition), and the dynamic of her work reflects this. While science expands our knowledge of the world through the study of living organisms as objects, animism focuses on our relatedness to the natural world, so that rather than thinking about the world we are alive and responsive to it.13 One side has clearly dominated in our world, at increasing cost. Fiona aims to get beyond the separation of these two ways of thinking, bringing them together in mutual dissonance and, in the words of Bruno Latour and many others, shifting from ‘economy to ecology’—closer to the reciprocal and respectful relationships humans have with animals within Aboriginal culture, for example. She is drawn to the simplicity, unforecon-sciousness and confidence of art from traditional cultures, or by outsider artists, and her own rituals and objects could constitute a reverse cargo cult, aimed at effecting such a shift. In her work there is an underlying mysticism that corrupts any scientific approach, however meticulously and logically applied. To paraphrase Walter Benjamin: ‘Her gift of seeing resemblances is nothing other than a rudiment of the powerful compulsion in former times to become and behave like something else’.13

spookiness of the figures. In other sculptures an aeroplane, helicopter, or bat bomb displace the Mamu, conceivably in this context personifying the devil of colonisation. Here, however, all are overpowered (exorcised??) by the creatures, which dwarf the machines. Interestingly, the Tjapangka Desert Weavers’ most animated sculptures are also the most devillish—not the lost native animals but the feral cats, the animals they know—fierce, hungry, and on the lookout.

From left: Mary Pan, Roma Butler, Rene Kulitja and Angkaliya Nelson in military uniforms supplied by Fiona Hall for use as weaving materials, artist camp near Pukalinyers, Western Australia, June 2014. Photograph: Fiona Hall
Fiona has an almost electrical sensitivity to currents in our world, an alertness to the not-quite-dead things that register histories and presage the future, coupled with an ability to create objects by hand with such dectority and mimetic acuity that maybe, through the revivifying power of representation, they might redirect time the right way. It is as if her intense engagement with the world is transferred through collecting, making, and arranging, an obsessive and continuous process of warding off the sadness, madness, and badness this very engagement produces, or at least intensifies. The mimetic and memorialising functions of recent works extend earlier photographic forays, but their human scale and multi-sensorial elements bring the installation into the realm of experience as well as documentation.

Wrong Way Time is in part a compendium of the ashes of modernity, a residue literally represented by charred cabinets and encyclopaedias that act as plinths for several works. Material about to be consigned to history abounds—cash, clocks, newspapers, coal—the detritus of a capitalist world that thrives on redundancy. But her work’s more profound subject is the casualties of the living. Drawing upon age-old iconography, she piles up the skeletons, skulls, and other remains; repetition and open sequences defer disaster and make us see our fear of the end. Wrong Way Time is in part a compendium of the ashes of modernity, a residue of the exhibition presents the figures within a geometric structure resembling several earlier grids of hanging figures or part-bodies, which likewise responded to wars as we observe them on our screens. Slash and Burn, 1997, was Fiona’s response to seeing television footage of the Rwandan genocide. Its black body parts made of videotape from war films ‘hover, in memorion, challenging Hollywood’s glamorisation of war with an image of indiscriminate destruction’, and, as it turns out so many times in Fiona’s work, in memory of videotape itself. In Scar Tissue, 2003–04, she again knitted videotape unspooled from war movies into body parts and children’s toys, mimicking the horrifying yet ultimately numbing images on our televisions at a time when Australia itself had become enmeshed in conflicts in the Middle East. As Fiona extrapolates from reading about the unity and disharmony in ant colonies according the degree of genetic variation within them, ‘we are hardwired to be competitive and to fight. It just goes on … I think the whole “wrong way time” thing is not just of the new, it is forever and a day, and it is part of biology, it is what Darwin calls the survival of the fittest.’

Yet an accelerating sense of unease about the future and the ramping up of global conflict has increased the urgency of Fiona’s work. An intense, compacted energy characterises the ghoulish heads of All the King’s Men, knitted from camouflage garments from many militaries, ‘signifiers of the prevalence and omnipresence of warring forces’. This nihilistic core of the installation are all the King’s Men (pages 78–90) and Wrong Way Time (pages 57–62, 116–20). Fiona conceived All the King’s Men as ‘a field of free-hanging, three-dimensional heads—some figurative, some contorted into other states of being, or not being—that lend this work its undeniable affective power’. It is this power that Fiona recognises in African sculpture, which she has long observed and which has become an increasing influence, a power that gives form to the unconscious, as Picasso maintained was his aim in Les Demoiselles d’Avignon, 1907, when he described it as ‘the first canvas of exorcism’. Here, too, the faces are masks, life solidified into empty shells that we look through or that look at us. No longer foot soldiers but grief objects or spirit figures, they are made over and over in a kind of incantation or petition: one dead, one more, another, and another. Their bodies are mere vestiges articulated by ragged seams, adorned with the occasional remaining button or epaulette—a memento mori for a world that continues to unravel politically and at its social and cultural edges.

These figures are not so much about the horror of war as of it. In this field of war camouflage both conceals and dazzles: conceals in that different camouflage patterns mimic each other as much as they vary in type, uniting the figures and their military counterparts (Iraq, Ukraine, Russia, Sri Lanka, Australia, Germany, Estonia, France, and Italy) in a variagated vegetal and animal field, dazzles in the magical power of its transformation and the remarkable energy of its making.

Another major component of the exhibition is a large group of clocks, Wrong Way Time, painted with images and texts on the installation’s interlinked themes. It forms a wall of lament and animates the entire space with sound—an audio luminary to match the beautifully lit cabinet of cutouts that serves as a casket of a set of three clocks, joining a graveyard of painted skulls and skeletons, dramatised by the resemblance of the long-case clocks to coffins and the circular faces painted with images and texts on the installation’s interlinked themes. The sound is composed of resonant and melodious chimes on the hour, and parts thereof; the raucous sounds of cuckoo clocks; and recordings of crows that introduce a sense of space as their caws diminish in strength.

Masking the glass face of the title clock Wrong Way Time, a red U-turn painted anticlockwise over the growth rings of a tree conveys Fiona’s feeling that we seem to be going backwards. As an index of past time, the log’s rings also reveal a future literally lopped off. This metaphor extends into allegory as Fiona replicates media images, such as those of the Islamic State propaganda video from September 2014 depicting the beheading of a journalist. The masked assassin appears on several clocks, joining a graveyard of painted skulls and skeletons, dramatised by the resemblance of the long-case clocks to coffins and the circular faces of mantle clocks to disembodied heads. They stand like so many memorial tomets—in the Australian context not dissimilar to the hollow log coffins of The Aboriginal Memorial, 1988, at the National Gallery of Australia—and in a typical overlaying they memorialise the analogue clock itself.

Some clocks are painted with texts that have the directness and incantatory quality of protest signs—there is little of Fiona’s characteristic craft here.
Graffiti she saw in Adelaide inspired Endings Are the New Beg (page 26), poetic in its economy: its blunt end just like losing a job, to start begging or to begin with the future in doubt. It accords with a general sense of urgency, even mania, which is heightened by the contrast of the texts with the sober, upright, bourgeois objects they are painted on.

Fiona’s crude handwritten capitals press the point amid the rows of tally marks counting the dead, coiled barber wire, felled logs, skulls, and skeletons: COUNTING FOR NOTHING, NO MAN’S LAND, UNLUCKY STRIKE, WRONG WAY TIME, MELTDOWNS, ZERO HOURS. Curiously, clocks have no zero, so keep the ultimate end at bay. Their passing regular beat is set against the cumulative and random events of history; as Fiona says, ‘it just goes on’. The resonant chimers of floor and mantle clocks offer a strange calm and certainty, but the cuckoos and caws unsettle as much as the images, evoking the sense that time is running out.

At the same time the exhibition requires us to slow down, to somehow enter the slow time of its making (for Fiona there is never enough time; though there is a shift to more spontaneous works many are supremely intricate). As noted by Gregory O’Brien, time is crafted in much of her work, and folds back in on itself through repetition.20 Through a continuous process of making, the present is stretched out so that both the past and the future may enter. Fiona conceived Wrong Way Time as an odd archaeology that’s dug out of the recesses of my take on the ‘now’.21 Her ‘now’ is as much spatial as it is temporal, not an evanescent moment, but what one theorist has described, characterising a digital world in (and hopefully unexpected) ways.22

Her collections of found materials register movements of people, plants, and capital across the globe, as well as her own explorations or travels (the driftwood, the banknotes, a giant lump of coal literally dug out of the ground), or give presence to contested borders and issues of our time (atlases, newspapers). Other elements of the installation recall works by contemporary artists (Kader Attia, Narelle Jubelin, Colin McCahon, Giuseppe Penone and Ricky Swallow are some that come to mind), though they have become Fiona’s own and seem also to emerge from the history of her own practices; or tap into general artistic trends—the ‘archaeological turn’, the ‘curatorial turn’, the new Bronze Age, a focus on ecology, and the future and the may enter, Fiona conceived Wrong Way Time as an odd archaeology that’s dug out of the recesses of my take on the ‘now’.21 Her ‘now’ is as much spatial as it is temporal, not an evanescent moment, but what one theorist has described, characterising a digital world in (and hopefully unexpected) ways.22

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The profusion of things is contained by geometry and chromatic restriction, with an overall palette dominated by black and earthy grey-green and silver-white tones. Much of it is housed in more than twenty metres of tall, charred cabinets that form a large square, encasing the figures in All the King’s Men. Fittingly, Fiona has a penchant for geometrical metaphysics, for instance Jain cosmologies, and indeed the exhibition plan is like a mandala, though her central gods are not enlightened beings but rather those from a secular pantheon that dramatise the extremes of human folly. The formation of driftwood is echoed by another cosmological diagram constructed from car headlamps lit up like stars. Numbers from the Fibonacci sequence are painted on a clock conveying both the exponential rise of deforestation and natural growth patterns. In Platonic Underground (page 76) lead potatoes have been shaped as the five Platonic solids, of interest to Fiona for their history of representing perfection since ancient times, the mathematical substructure of the world. Her solids retain their lumpen potato-ness, a bizarre and beautiful melding of the ideal and the real, culture and nature.

In turn these ‘potatoes’ link with other staples and products of the Earth—bread, crystals, coal. The indubitables geometrical structure of a crystal is offset by the vagaries of the daily news in a multilayered cabinet filled with bronze crystals emerging from layers of newspapers—representing the precious and the expendable too, a pairing with resonance across the exhibition. These crystalline
forms retain the channels, ridges, and imperfections of the corrugated cardboard they were cast from, as if the substructure of our world is being eaten away. Or are they just aberrations that mimic natural variation? In a matching cabinet, pieces of broad shaped into bones, brick walls and other formations that suggest conflict are laid over open atlases—a source of sustenance atop sites of conflict, the beautifully rendered contours of borders past and present.

These and other curiosities invite speculation about the resilience of our planet, and draw attention to what we have lost, or need to protect. Untitled comprises a collection of vintage Chinese cork dioramas in a cabinet with live spiders. If all goes to plan, these handmade miniature landscapes will gradually be overtaken by an equally intricate network of spider webs. Used for Feng Shui placements and given names such as ‘Long Forgotten Land’, they are in effect mini-museums, remnants of exotic landscapes—replete with storks, tea houses, pagodas, pandas, and willows—destroyed or threatened by massive urban development. Fiona consigns them to the deadening space of the museum cabinet and lets nature take its revenge.

Throughout Wrong Way Time, clusters of objects, images, and words—each element of which has its genesis in a particular political event or personal experience that could be unravelled in detail—point to the way we objectify and manipulate nature or to the reality of our own animal nature. Fiona Hall’s work aligns with the views of those who approach non-human environments through what is now called a ‘relational’ stance. It is ecological and future-oriented; everything is interconnected—words and actions here have repercussions there. Both warning and inspiration, Fiona’s proliferating display paradoxically wills a future of restraint and austerity rather than growth, one described by Bruno Latour: ‘Tomorrow’, those who have stopped being resolutely modern murmur, ‘we’re even more than yesterday we’re going to feel ourselves bound by an even greater number of constraints imposed by ever more numerous and more diverse beings.’

1. As such, this commentary is a general one on the ideas of the exhibition and some of its components, not a reading of an installation whose complex interconnections will become apparent only at the time of exhibition.

2. References to such ideas abound in discussions of the Anthropocene, the term widely used to describe a new geological era, one in which human actions drive accelerated change to Earth systems, breaking down any separation between nature and culture, a concept visualised in Fiona’s art for many years.


5. I am indebted to Julie Ewington for the reference. Fiona was raised in a home of conservationists with leftist leanings.


11. Fiona Hall, conversation with the author, 8 July 2014.


15. Julie Ewington, Fiona Hall, p. 140.


17. David Hansen, ‘Cryopreserved palimpsesters’, p. 44.


23. Fiona Hall, proposal for the 2015 Venice Biennale.

A rising tide lifts all boats.
—popular saying, often attributed to J.F. Kennedy

According to Title 18, Chapter 17 of the U.S. Code, that section which deals with currency crimes, anyone who ‘mutilates, cuts, defaces, disfigures, or perforates, or unites or cements together, or does any other thing to any bank bill, draft, note or other evidence of debt issued by any national banking association, or Federal Reserve bank, or the Federal Reserve system, with intent to render such bank bill, draft, note or other evidence of debt unfit to be reissued’ can be liable to a fine or imprisonment.

Fiona Hall need not be concerned. The works of art in which she employs banknotes do not entail criminal intent, but are rather means of value-adding. In her various money sculptures the flat sheet of the currency is not so much mutilated or defaced as it is converted: from a simple, regular plane surface into the perceptual paradox of a Möbius strip, from a signifier of national identity and personal wealth to a mordant critique of political economy. She takes the banknote into the domain of metaphor, treating its physical, material form in the cavalier, perspective-busting manner of Piranesi’s architectural fantasias, its pictorial-symbolic decoration in the teasing political manner of Dread Scott’s What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S. flag? 1988.

In the context of Hall’s total oeuvre, such transfiguration is nothing new. In the mid-1980s she participated in an Australian Centre for Photography project with the American Polaroid Corporation, working with the large-format camera in Polaroid’s New York 24 x 20 Studio. Recalling that experience, the artist later commented that ‘the technical restrictions of the Polaroid large-format camera for extreme close-up work—the depth of field is reduced to almost zero—made me look for ways of creating images that appeared to have a greater depth than was actually possible.’

This statement, as well as the low-relief tin tableaux to which it alludes, points to a subtle but distinctive aspect of Hall’s practice, her attention to or articulation of complex spatialities. Behind or beneath the direct and compelling imagery of her objects and installations lie various topological revisions or re-imaginings, which transform her chosen media through a kind of dimensional sleight-of-hand.

In Medicine Bundle for the Non-Born Child, 1993, for example, a typically rich cultural commentary devolves on that typical figure of modern America, the Coke can. Beginning with this familiar pop-culture, Pop-art motif, Hall’s longstanding botanical interests led her to explore the resonances of the coca leaf and the cola nut (two of the beverage’s original ingredients, and the source of its famous brand name): the ritual narcotic use of each by indigenous peoples in South America and Africa, and in the case of the former the wrapping of magical ‘medicine bundles’ in coca leaves. Reinforcing this First World–Third World antinomy, she collapses...
the historical into the contemporary, introducing the fact (gleaned from a Harvard Medical School report) that Coca-Cola is a remarkably (ninety-one per cent) effective spermicidal douche, particularly useful in developing countries, where other forms of contraception may not be readily available. From here it is a short but significant imaginative and conceptual step to the making of a complete baby’s layette from shredded aluminium Coke cans, to an irony as sweet and as corrosive as the drink itself.

Yet behind these central scientific and social narratives, the work has a formal or rather structural backstory. The circles of Medicine Bundle’s teething ring-rattle are made from the top and bottom discs of Coke cans. Moving then from line and plane to solid geometry, Hall adds a six-pack of cylinders: rubber-toasted baby-bottle cans. Finally, she goes back to line, cutting other cans into thin strips of aluminium, which are then knitted into the soft, irregular, flexible forms of a jacket, a bonnet and a pair of booties.

A similar process can be seen in a work from ten years later, Scar Tissue, 2003. Here the artist addresses the horrible television spectacle of contemporary armed conflict by knitting children’s soft toys, severed heads, limbs and torsos from half-inch videotape, which spills out and up from war movie cassettes on the floor, rising like smoke from Iraqi oil wells, like black Rwandan genies released from quadrilateral lamps. With our attention held by the force of the nightmare iconography, we can easily miss the work’s protean material aspect, the fact that Scar Tissue’s original, motive source is the flat, rectangular screen image, which is stored on a 400-metre ribbon of magnetised mylar that is in turn rolled onto cylinders and contained in a rectangular plastic box before being pulled out and knitted into three-dimensional body parts.

Form and flux, substance and shift: Hall’s subliminal but consistent conceptual-constructive method is at the core of her works’ often disturbing, unbalancing, vertiginous affect. It is not just a matter of things being made from unlikely, unex ted materials, as, for example, sardine cans becoming botanico-erotic votive offerings (Paradisus Terrestres, 1989–2005), or fruit and flowers, bones and body parts being constructed with gorgeous, shimmering coloured beads (Understorey, 1989–2004), or military camouflage dress being reshaped as threatened animal species (Fall Prey, 2012). After all, art has always been essentially a metaphorical operation, by which base matter—coloured earth mixed with water, eggs or oil, or lumps of metal, stone and wood—is transmuted into something else entirely: a spirit, a person, a place, an idea. Rather, Hall’s material transformations have a more fundamental aspect, the rigorous scientific logic of mathematical theorems or the periodic table. Her media bloom and expand physically and sexually, intellectually and apperceptively, like the unfolding definitions of Linnaean binomial nomenclature.

In an age when much art is concerned, even obsessed, with the found object, with the unmade thing she, too, employs the most commonplace, quotidian materials: not only aluminium cans and videocassettes but also soap, Tupperware and PVC piping. And yet, as we have seen, her chosen media are not random selections but bear specific conceptual loads. At a time when much art is concerned, even obsessed with revealing process, with celebrating incompleteness or contingency, the materiality of plywood and plaster and/or low-tech obsessive-compulsive repetition, she, too, leaves technique exposed on the surface of the work. And yet her finely detailed carving, cutting, knitting and beading is not just reified labour, but necessary craftsmanship in the service of the idea and image she has in mind and in hand. At a time when much art is concerned, even obsessed, with message, with ‘addressing’ and ‘referencing’ and ‘interrogating’, she, too, engages with real-world issues of politics, social justice and in particular the manifold threats to the natural environment. And yet her skulls, clocks and camouflage, plants, birds and animals are not crusade branding devices, but elements in a thoroughly researched, carefully complex, nuanced and often (when it is not utterly depressing) witty discourse.

So when she uses money as a medium, it is not in the manner of that legion of American dollar doddlers who decorate, fold, cut and collage the greenback in order to achieve instant recognition and some sort of meaning-by-association. Neither do her banknote works have the flat, flattening manner of Andy Warhol’s dollar-bill paintings, where the deadpan satire is somewhat mired in the Factory’s habit of not quite linking with the art market. By the same token, nor does she employ the Futura Bold oppositional strategies of Barbara Kruger, in works such as Untitled (Money Can Buy You Love), 1985, or A Rich Man’s Joke is Always Funny, 2010, works which despite their polemical bite are still essentially framed by authority, by the modemist notion of the artist as autonomous creative subject. Hall’s installations exemplify a more subtle practice, the kind of work described by Canadian academic Max Havens as that which ‘draws specific attention to the deep affinity of both art and money as forms of mediation under capitalist totality’.2

That is to say, here is an artist who engages with the ramifications of global economics. Neither art nor money is simple, linear, causal; both are in fact signs of social relations, with all the complexities and contradictions inherent therein. Often they are not even actual. Neo-Dada, post-conceptualism and relational aesthetics are as far apart as acrobatics, as reenacté as derivative securities, credit default swaps and collateralised debt obligations. Both sets of operations, the artistic and the economic, depend on a certain level of communal desire or consensus or tolerance (or perhaps only false consciousness) for their maintenance.

Hall gets this, and gives it.

She came to the use of money some time after she had begun to explore in her work the dynamics of markets and empires, with banknotes first appearing in Cash Crop, 1999, a sculpture which is primarily concerned with the intertwining of the worlds of nature, science and trade. This vitrine installation presents eighty
plant products carved from soap arrayed across five glass shelves, all of them as precisely rendered as the late nineteenth-century papier-mâché models preserved in the artist’s beloved Santos Museum of Economic Botany in her home town of Adelaide. The choice of material is deliberately allusive; the specimens are carved from soap; some, not surprisingly, golden yellow, others (Caucasian) flesh pink. Soap also implies water, signifying maritime trade’s potential softening, blurring and even total dissolution of the natural ecosystems in which the plants originate and of the traditional uses and economic interests of the indigenous peoples of their source countries. Inscribed on the glass adjacent to each fruit or vegetable or seed pod is a label giving its Latin botanical and English common names, punningly matched against a term from the jargon of economics: thus the cola nut (Cola acuminata) previously encountered in Medicine Bundle for the Non-Born Child, here stands for ‘global liquidity’ and, similarly, a grape (Vitis vinifera) is a ‘liquid asset’, seaweed (Ascophyllum nodosum) is inscribed ‘offshore trading’, and the water chestnut (Trapa bicornis) ‘currency plunge’; a bitter lemon (Citrus limon) denotes ‘tax reform’, while ‘tax return’ is, in keeping with common experience, a peanut (Arapis hypogaea).

These sharp-edged double entendres refer variously to the appearance, growth conditions, natural and processed form, geographical-environmental origins and human usage of each of the plants represented. Indeed, as curator and art writer Julie Ewington has observed, ‘despite the simple structure of the work, the codings of Cash Crop are complex. Hall play[s] with conjointed systems of classification, purposefully slip-sliding ... botanical classifications intersect with economic terms and rich plays of meaning.’ What is not so elusive is the unavoidable term in the semiological and economic equation: capital. On the very bottom of the vitrine, below the shelves, at the base of the transparent trapezoid prism, as foundation or residue of the commodity trade, lies an opaque carpet of banknotes, each one decorated in ghostly white gouache with an image of a leaf of the plant whose fruit is represented above.

In her second sequence of currency works, Leaf Litter, 1999–2003, we see once again that subtle engagement with geometric structure, with creating images that [appear] to have a greater depth than [is] actually possible.’ Here the ‘trading floor’ of Cash Crop is turned through ninety degrees to a vertical, pictorial orientation, and the perceptual play is turned through ninety degrees to a vertical, pictorial orientation, and the perceptual play is turned

In the discrepancy between organic and rectangular shape, between nature and culture, but also in the discrepancies between the black and white image and the chromatic variety of the money, and between the image repertoire of the plant kingdom and that of the kingdoms of men, with its portraits of heads of state, national heroes and patriotic symbols. Most noticeable, if not most significant, are the differences of scale. Each leaf is painted at its actual, natural size, requiring the artist to increase her rectangular expenditure to accommodate the larger species; her spectacular lotus (Nelumbo nucifera) leaf covers no fewer than eighteen Cambodian 1000 riel notes.

In the following money series, one of her most intriguing, the spatial frame of reference segues from the one-to-one ratio to the global scale. When My Boat Comes In, 2003– (pages 107–11) is based on a simple but brilliant conceit: the matching of national banknote images of various marine or riverine vessels, of ‘anything that floats, really’ — Peruvian reed canoes and Chinese junks and Egyptian dhows; clippers and steamers and container ships; galleons and frigates and submarines—with plants of economic value to be found in those countries. Cotton (Gossypium hirsutum) from Mexico, rubber (Hevea brasiliensis) from Brazil, kauri pine (Agathis australis) from Aotearoa New Zealand, haricot beans (Phaseolus vulgaris) from Peru—each specimen (and plant) has its own rich and complex story. Given the imperial ambition of the series, and its temporal continuity, it is clearly not possible here to give details of each one. Equally, however, given the Venice Biennale’s traditional function as a site of national cultural representation, and given Hall’s interest in colonial histories, it is appropriate to consider one example of particular relevance to Australia, an English note decorated with an oak leaf (Quercus robur).

Historically, given that metal currency bore the image of the king or queen on the obverse, the crime of ‘coining’ was deemed to be an offence against the crown, and therefore punishable by death. From the end of the seventeenth century, the inexorable logic of jurisprudence saw the capital penalty also being applied to the forgery of Bank of England paper notes. During the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, Britain’s gold bullion reserves were severely depleted, and following a run on the provincial banks, the Bank of England suspended specie (gold and silver) payments, with its banknotes becoming de facto currency. Furthermore, throughout the ensuing so-called ‘Restriction Period’, from 1797 to 1821, it also issued low-value £1 and £2 notes, of dubious quality and security. These measures led to a virtual epidemic of forgery; in 1801 more than £15,000 worth of forged notes was discovered; by 1817 that figure had risen to £372,000. The Bank was assiduous in pursuing the criminals, and while an 1801 law allowed offenders the option of a plea bargain to the lesser crime of possession (punishable by fourteen years’ transportation), between 1800 and 1827 over 350 people were hanged.
Part of the problem was the ease with which the notes could be reproduced, and while the Bank's search for a technical solution was at best dilatory, the wider community was clearly concerned; in 1819 we find a report from a committee of the Society of Arts ‘Relative to the Mode of Preventing the Forgery of Bank Notes’. From the same year comes Hall’s bill, a political satire by George Cruickshank published by William Hone in the form of a ‘Bank Restriction Note’, with eleven men and women on the gallows, prisoners’ shackles, a noose, a cameo of Britannia as Saturn eating her children and other relevant images, the note bearing the mock-signature (on behalf of the Bank’s governors) of the notorious seventeenth-century executioner Jack Ketch. Behind the figure of Britannia, lightly etched, are four ships, each with a pennant fluttering from its mainmast labelled ‘TRANSPORT.’

This is where Australia’s boats came in. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, hundreds of convicts were transported to New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land for forgery, uttering or possession. Much of settler Australia’s early visual culture was based not just on the imperial lie of terra nullius, but on the individual falsehoods of colonial painters such as Thomas Watling, Joseph Lycett, T.G. Wainewright, Joseph Backler, George Peacock and Knut Bull, and the architects Francis Greenway and James Blackburn. The chorus of the Royal Navy anthem Hearts of Oak includes the line: ‘We’ll fight and we’ll conquer again and again.’ The empire of money always prevails, even over itself. In pursuit of appropriate combinations of image and nation, since she started work on When My Boat Comes In Hall has become gradually enmeshed in, even obsessed by, the world of numismatics and its sub-discipline of notaphily. Employing the same methodology that she uses for her ship money, Hall has more recently embarked on several new series, working with other motifs symbolic of economic or political power. Untitled, 2015, features banknotes showing the tractor, emblem of broad-acre agricultural modernisation, of Soviet-inspired five-year plans and commodity exports. Triumph of the Dammed, 2015, focuses on hydroelectric or agricultural dams, those high profile, capital-intensive, multinational-rewarding development projects so beloved of both Third World autocrats and the debt-mongers of the World Bank. A third current sequence, Spill, 2015, explores development projects so beloved of both Third World autocrats and the debt-cartels of the World Bank. A third current sequence, Spill, 2015, explores commodity exports. Ultimately, Where the Wind Blows, she has selected notes bearing the portraits of sundry dictatorial generals and presidents, which she decorates with flowing curves, map contours or isobars described in dotted lines of swimming sperm, diagrams of the primal natural forces of the earth and the weather and the masculine will to power.

In her exploration of the world of banknotes, Hall experiences and re-presents to the viewer that strange electricity, that tension—well-known to collectors and curators alike—that arises between the individual object or artefact or work of art and the field from which it arises, between the type specimen and the entire classificatory system, between William Blake’s grain of sand and the universe, between John Ruskin’s one leaf and the world. This incommensurable gap is the space of connoisseurship, the locus of value, and the site of socio-economic and political consensus. Not coincidentally, Hall’s complaint of the difficulties of the numismatic hunt makes her sound like a merchant banker: ‘Money has become so much more expensive... the Chinese are buying a lot...’ Between the necessity of our monthly pay packets and the baffling abstractions of the nightly news’ stock market report lies an act of faith; god and capital inhabit the gap. But there is nothing there.

In one of her most moving vitrine installations, Tender, 2003–06, Hall uses sliced up American dollar bills to weave elaborate, scientifically accurate models of the nests of dozens of different bird species. At one level this work is a characteristically overdetermined play on words, matching the term ‘legal tender’ that appears on the banknotes with the instinctive tenderness associated with reproduction and the nurture of the young. It is also an expression of the artist’s longstanding interest in the similarities and contradictions between different systems of classification, different systems of knowledge, the vitrines being inscribed both with lists of the avian genus and species responsible for each type of nest, and with the two-letter, eight-digit serial numbers of the notes used to create them. Here, too, she employs that idiosyncratic topological-transformative method described above, first dissecting rectangular plane surfaces to make linear strips, then reassembling them into fully three-dimensional, curving concavities.
But the key to the work is not its artifice, but its emptiness. Not only are there no birds—no parents, no chicks, no eggs, even. There are no trees—no protection, no photosynthesis, no oxygen respiration. Just the faintest echo of faded chlorophyll in the lichen or lawn-clipping green of the paper currency itself. There is, in fact, no environment, other than the abstract museum space of the vitrine. The vacancy is terribly affecting. Ewington writes of the ‘deep melancholy’ of the work: ‘This village of empty nests is indescribably sad. It speaks to me of loss, of remembering, even of haunting’.10 At the same time, however, through the use of the banknotes Hall not only indicts transnational monopoly capitalism for the current planetary ecocide, but also points out the internal contradictions of the system. Shredded, the notes are worthless. Even in its own terms, the global economy, like the art world, is full of holes, whether the $34.4 trillion of capital lost through the Global Financial Crisis of 2007–09, the more than $3 trillion annual cost of worldwide tax evasion, or the sixty-five per cent of stock market trades that are now fully, algorithmically automated. No nest egg is secure. The boat never comes in.

Notes
4. Fiona Hall, telephone conversation with the author, 7 November 2014.
5. It is particularly appropriate that the work should be seen in Venice. Firstly, because of La Serenissima’s historic role as a maritimes and mercantile capital, a key vector in the trade between Europe and the East. Secondly, because it is currently a site where both environment and community are threatened by the ongoing depredations of capital: not only by the rising sea levels that are the result of global warming from 200 years of industrial-age carbon emissions, but also by the Magistrato delle Acque’s present plan to further degrade the lagoon’s fragile ecosystem by dredging the Canale Contorta Sant’Angelo, a convenient channel for Costa’s monster cruise ships.
7. Report of the committee of the Society of Arts, &c., together with the approved communications and evidence upon the same, relative to the mode of preventing the forgery of bank notes, Royal Society of Arts, London, 1819.
8. In ‘Traditio. Fiona Hall’ (Artlink, vol. 21 no. 4, 2001), Stephanie Radok finds an apt and intriguing resonance in Ruskin’s dictum ‘If you can paint one leaf you can paint the world’ having been quoted by Bernard Smith in the concluding paragraph of his European Vision and the South Pacific (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1960, p. 257).
Wrong Way Time incorporates a group of works made by Fiona Hall and eleven women from Tjanpi Desert Weavers from the Central and Western Desert region of Australia—Roma Butler, Yangi Yangi Fox, Rene Kulitja, Niningka Lewis, Yvonne Lewis, Molly Miller, Angkaliya Nelson, Mary Pan, Sandra Peterman, Tjawina Roberts, and Nyanu Watson—as part of a project commissioned for the TarraWarra Biennial 2014: Whisper in My Mask, curated by Natalie King and Djon Mundine.

Extending the Tjanpi Desert Weavers’ history of making animals in local grasses and other materials, and her own explorations about the effects of colonisation, Fiona suggested they work together to make endangered or extinct desert animals. The women drew upon their intimate and intricate relationship with animals, embedded in the interrelatedness of people, place, story, ancestral and lived experience that they call Tjukurpa (Dreaming), and arising from their knowledge of hunting, tracks and animal behaviour—including that of the predatory feral cat.

An artists’ camp was held for this collaborative project in June 2014 at a place near Pilakatilyuru (about thirty kilometres from the community of Wingellina in Western Australia, in the tri-state border region close to South Australia). The women collected local tjanpi (grass), while Fiona brought Australian and British military garments. They used each other’s materials as well as incorporating found objects to create Kuka Iritija (Animals from Another Time), inspired by the plight of endangered species.

The women spoke about the collaboration in an interview with Jo Foster and Linda Rive in October 2014. Translations are by Linda Rive.

Takirinya Tjawina Roberts

Kuruntu kulira ngaturinganyi, Australiaku tju.

In our heart of hearts we worry deeply about the whole of Australia.

Paliçu tjana kumpinu, ngatutinga tiṟṯa. Iritiṯa tiṟṯa kumpinji, animals tiṟṯa. Ka nonganu mankurpa mankurpa kanjini kuwaṟi.

Our animals have hidden themselves away, the poor things. The animals of old are now hiding somewhere. We now have only a few animals left.


I have never seen a waḻpuṯ (numbat). I may have possibly seen one when I was a small child but I don’t remember. My grandfather, grandmother, mother and father
would have hunted and eaten walputi. My great-grandfather certainly. They all hunted and ate those animals. They always used to talk about them.

Katjalu, kamulu tjana kuka mala ngalkupai. Irititja, mai wiyangka. Nganan a hunted and ate those animals. They always used to talk about them.

Great-grandfather and great-grandmother and their generations always hunted and ate malari (rufous hare-wallaby). Back in the old days, before white flour. Nowadays we work as rangers, caring for our land.

We find it easy to make animals that we see on a daily basis and know. We know what their feet and paws and mouths look like, and we replicate them in tjalku. We have been told all about those old animals. What kind of fur they have. What their fur patterns are. But we don’t intimately know what their paws look like in detail.*

Yangi Yangi Fox

People in the outside world do not know about our animals. Our tjanku animals are kurupu tjana nguwanga—it is as if they have their own spirit energy.

Rene Kuitja

We all carry skin names and totemic ancestors, like emu. For me, my totemic ancestral tjukurpa is an experienced sensation, not just an animal or an object that I can point at and experience as a physical thing.

Mary Pan

Those animals are our kuka initja that we used to hunt and eat, but which have now disappeared. They have all died and are no more. We don’t know why. It could be because of fallout from the atomic bombs. It could be from bushfires. It happened a long time ago. A big fire can wipe out whole colonies of animals. But we suspect the bomb killed many of our animals. The bomb was responsible for a lot of deaths. Not many people in Australia understand this. Yes, there have been bushfires too, and yes, I know foxes and feral cats have wreaked untold havoc on our animals, but today I want to focus on the damage that the bomb has done. We lost a lot after that bomb fallout. Some of our animals have been saved and placed on remote islands to breed back up again, but we people living out here have lost our animals from our own country, which disappeared when we were children. The bomb was detonated when we were children and we were all forcibly moved to places like this. We were moved to the Fragon area, and we then lived in Ernabella. Many of us became terribly ill. My mother died from that bomb fallout. I had to grow up without a mother. I only had my father to look after me. My older sister and my older brother looked after me too, after the bomb killed our mother, and all those animals.

* This paragraph and other artists’ comments were recorded in English only so do not appear in Pitjantjatjara.

Talking about the bomb upsets me terribly because I have never got over losing my mother. I don’t like to be reminded of it. We never got to eat any of those animals that our grandmothers’ generation ate regularly. All we have are those tjanku animals that we have made. Our lands have been emptied of our tjukurpa animals. Some of us have seen tjukurpa (great desert skink lizard) and nganamara (mallee fowl) but only very rarely. Most of our small mammals disappeared when we were just tiny children.

Our family was supposed to be safe in Ernabella, but people died in Ernabella. People died on Wijintji, Granite Downs. People died at Mimili. People died in many other places. I can’t keep this story inside. Sometimes I have to talk about it. Put this story in the catalogue because not enough people know about it. I can never forget what happened to us. I remember what happened. It stays with me always. At night when I am lying down, trying to sleep, I see my mother’s face. She died from the fallout from the bomb. I can never forget her. I can never forget why she died. She and many other people all died from the puyu (fallout). All those animals died too.

Niningka Lewis


At the workshop we sculpted ninu, wayuta and tjali. We made all of those animals for this exhibition. We made walputi, partja, mitja and tarkawarte. We made mitja, which is a large animal, which burrows deep holes, and which was once an important meat animal. They lived in the tjurra grasses, and they carried grasses into their burrows to make nests in which to lie. All these animals are part of our past heritage.

Tjungu wuji. Ngapartji ngapartji nintinu. Palyulu palya ngarya tjara nintinu, ka nganku nganja nintinu. Our workshop was a shared space, where we taught each other. Fiona Hall brought out army clothing and showed us how she works with them, and she showed her how we work with tjani.

Ngapartji ngapartji nintinu. Palyulu tin-meat ngapartji palyanu mu mu milk tin, tjanku ngurangka ngapartji palyanu, mitja ngurangka ngapartji palyanu, mitja ngurangka ngapartji palyanu. Palyulu-tjurtja nganjka ngapartji nintinu. I made a mala (rufous hare-wallaby). She worked with tin-meat tins, and milk tins, all sorts of tjamptja (tin cans), cutting them up with scissors. She used bird feathers, placing them on the pieces, which looked really good. She worked with old billycans.
I have made a possum (wayuta) and a bilby (ninu) for our exhibition. I really had to think really hard about them, to be able to make them. I have never seen them. Well, I have seen possums once, in the mala paddock. Our animals have changed completely. I always used to hear stories about wayuta.

The old people used to hunt them at night, killing them in the moonlight. While the children were fast asleep, the hunters would go out in the moonlight, or in the light of the rising moon, and hunt possums in the ngalta (kurrajong) trees, where the possums would be hiding.

I have never eaten possum but my older sister has. She would eat the meat back in the old days. Everybody used to talk about it. My older sister always talks about these old days, and so did our mother, and I remember all those old stories clearly.

My older sister probably knows about their ears and their feet that were good for climbing.

So today all we have to eat are red kangaroos (malu), emus (imiyu), bush turkey (kipara) and perentie lizards (ngintaka). Those are the only meat animals we modern people of today get to eat. We feel a great compassion towards the early-days meat animals of yesteryear. Our forebears lived alongside them and saw them every day.

I have a theory that our meat animals disappeared when we started to eat white flour and sugar. Another theory is that the bomb killed them all off, but I just don’t know, I am not sure. These were our foods and as soon as we switched foods to white peoples’ foods, the animals all disappeared.

Jo Foster

That is interesting too, Niningka, because when you think about it in the exhibition those tins the animals are sitting on, they are flour drum, sugar drum, tjam-tjam…

Niningka Lewis

I have a theory that our meat animals disappeared when we started to eat white flour, sugar and tea. Another theory is that the bomb killed them all off, but I just don’t know, I am not sure.

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traditional flour seeds that our forebears had always gathered in their wooden dishes, cleaning and winnowing them, then grinding them and cooking them in the coals of the fire, before eating their seed cakes. They drank only fresh water. That is how they lived, threshing and winnowing their seeds. Such good food it was, and such a variety, including kampurarpa (desert raisins) wirinywirinypa and tawaltawalpa (bush tomatoes), tulypurpa (bush gooseberries) and other delicious fruits. Important and sustaining fruits. Staple foods, along with bush meat animals.


Inside the tins and drums came jam, which our forebears saw for the first time. White people brought it into our lands on camel back, and were handing it out to our people. They gave them different foodstuffs, white flour, jam, sugar and more flour. They gave them the foods and then said, ‘Go! Go to Ernabella! Go to Ernabella!’ So some people were taken to Ernabella, and some were taken to Warburton and others were taken to Papunya. They were brought here and shown all the new things, this and that. They had been told by the white people, ‘At Ernabella there is abundant food. Ernabella and Warburton.’ That’s what they were told. So everybody went there. Most couples only had one child at the time. Nobody had illnesses, everyone was in excellent health, bless them. Not today though, today we are all sick people. Diabetes. High blood-pressure. Kidney problems. Renal failure. Everybody is sick now, in every community.

Palu nganang piya wiya nyinangi palu payu kutjungku.

We were not sick before the nuclear fallout landed on us.

Fiona Hall

On Manuski (Travellers) 2014

I collected the driftwood from the beach at Awanui on Aotearoa New Zealand’s North East Cape, where the Waiapu River flows out to the sea. Storms and landslips bring fallen trees down from the forests upstream; years of intensive farming have caused large-scale erosion that is now silting up and reshaping the river at its mouth. When the Waiapu (which means rushing water) finally reaches the sea its cargo of fallen timber is thrown back onto the beach by the tide, piled up like bones from a forest graveyard. Scattered among them you can find the creatures of the woods and water, travellers from a former forest life, reshaped by the ocean currents and now journeying to another life back in the world of the living.

Ngā kōrero i roto i te reo Māori

I kohia te tāwhaowhao mai i tātuhia ki Awanui, ki Te Taiwihiti o Te Ika a Māui, Aotearoa ki te takawa e rere te Waiapu ki roto i Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa. Ka haria atu ngā rākau o uta ki te moana e ngā āwhā me ngā hau whenua. Nā te maha o ngā tāwhaowhao iwi, ka whakamahia ano te whenua mo te atua whenua i horo mai te whenua, kei te kōkā hoa mō ngā tāwhaowhao ki te parahua, o, ka rerekē hoa te atua o te ngutu a tahi. Tia tahi atu ngā wai ki te Waiapu ki te moana, ka kauwha ngā rākau iwi te nga hau te hanga ki uta e nga tāwhaowhao, ki te atua te whenua, te nga tāwhaowhao, te hoa te nga tāwhaowhao, tia tahnau kia tāwhaowhao iwi te nga tāwhaowhao, ki te atua te nga tāwhaowhao, ki te nga tāwhaowhao, ka kauwha ngā rākau o te nga tāwhaowhao, o te whenua, o te nga tāwhaowhao, ka kauwha ngā rākau o te nga tāwhaowhao, ka kauwha ngā rākau o te nga tāwhaowhao, ka kauwha ngā rākau o te nga tāwhaowhao, ka kauwha ngā rākau o teanga tahi, ka kauwha ngā rākau o te nga tahi, ka kauwha ngā rākau o te nga tahi, ka kauwha ngā rākau o te nga tahi.

Translation by Makere Atkins

Fiona Hall at Awanui Beach, 2012

Photographs: Natalie Robertson
Wrong Way Time 2012–15 (detail)
Wrong Way Times 2012–15 (details)
Quercus robur: English oak
from the series Paradies: Terrastra 1990–2005
Opposite:
Wrong Way Time: 2012–15 (detail)
Hand Over Fist 2013
photograph: Jennifer French

Opposite
Wrong Way Time 2012–15 (detail)
photograph courtesy: Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
Willy Wagtail (Rhipidura leucophrys) / Tjin-tjintirpa marangka
from Kula Inala (Animals from Another Time) 2014

Opposite
Wrong Way Time 2012–15 (detail)
Opposite
Holdfast (Macrocystis angustifolia, giant kelp) 2007
All the King’s Men 2014–15 (details)
All the King’s Men 2014–15 (details)
Aeroplane with Black Cockatoos and Bones / Iyiyipirima, bali megy muru tinka from Kukunintja (Animals from Another Time) 2014
Mamu and Frog / Mamu-munu-nganap
from Kuku Yalanji (Animals from Another Time) 2014
Mamu and Western Quoll (Dasyurus geoffroii) / Mamu munu Partjata from Kuka Irititja (Animals from Another Time) 2014

Opposite

Manikari (Travellers) 2014–15 (detail)

Following pages
Kuka Irititja (Animals from Another Time) 2014

From left to right:
Angkaliya Nelson
Ngapu (Feral Cat; Felis catus)

Molly Miller
Tjawalpi (Lesser Stick-nest Rat; Leporillus apicaks)
Miki (Burrunggurr (Bettongia lesueurii))
Piai (Tawny Frogmouth; Podargus strigoides), on billy can

Tjawina Roberts
Yirramuji (Marsupial Mole; Notoryctes typhlops)

Niningka Lewis
Mala (Rufous Hare-wallaby; Lagorchestes hirsutus), on billy can
Ngapu (Feral Cat; Felis catus)

Nyaru Watson
Mala (Rufous Hare-wallaby; Lagorchestes hirsutus) photograph: Christian Capurro
Uroptychus sp.; squat lobster
Flag U (Uniform): ‘You are running into danger.’
from Fleet 2012

Solenosmilla variabilis; branching stony coral
Flag M (Mike): ‘My vessel is stopped and making no way through the water.’
from Fleet 2012
Cinnamomum camphora: camphor
from When My Boat Comes in 2003–
Ribes grossularia; gooseberry
from When My Boat Comes In 2003–

Opposite
Pinus radiata; radiata pine
from When My Boat Comes In 2003–
Cinnamomum camphora; camphor
from When My Boat Comes In 2003–

Anacardium occidentale; cashew nut
from When My Boat Comes In 2003–
Triumph of the Damned 2015 (detail)
Wrong Way Trees 2012–15 (details)
This list is correct at the time of printing. Titles of works in progress are designated ‘Untitled’ without italics.

Works are ordered by date then alphabetically.

Measurements are height before width before depth.

Art works are courtesy of Fiona Hall and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, unless otherwise stated.

**Fiona Hall**

**Quercus robur; English oak**

*Paradisus Terrestris* 1990–2005

aluminium sardine tin

25 x 16.3 x 2.5 cm

Collection of the artist; on loan to

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

Tender 2003–08

US dollars, wire, vitrines, vinyl lettering

86 nests, ranging from approx. 5 x 10 (diam.) cm to 108 x 17 x 13 cm; 2 vitrines, each 220 x 360 x 150 cm overall

Collection Queensland Art Gallery


Fiona Hall: Wrong Way Time includes the nests and vinyl lettering only.

**When My Boat Comes In**

2003–

gouache on banknotes

installation dimensions variable

Holdfast (*Macrocystis angustifolia; giant kelp*) 2007

aluminium fish tin

25 x 16.3 x 2.5 cm

Fleet 2012

enamel paint, aluminium fish tins

12 parts, 20 x 24 cm, 24 x 14 cm, 22 x 13 cm, 25 x 19 cm, 22 x 12 cm, 25 x 11 cm, 26 x 24 cm, 25 x 10 cm, 25 x 20 cm, 25 x 19 cm, 34 x 10 cm, 25 x 19 cm

Wrong Way Time 2012–15

installation of longcase clocks, cuckoo clocks, mantle clocks, a banjo clock, and crow recordings; enamel and oil on clocks, wooden walking stick, model aeroplane, alarm clock set into volumes of British Museum’s General Catalogue of Printed Books: Ten-year Supplement, 1956–1965

8 longcase clocks, ranging from approx. 137 x 31 x 18 cm to 220 x 40 x 23 cm; 18 cuckoo clocks, ranging from approx. 32 x 24 x 15 cm to 74 x 36 x 19 cm, not including chimes; 12 mantle clocks, ranging from 22 x 32 x 13 cm to 57 x 36.5 x 13 cm; 1 banjo clock, 104 x 32 x 11 cm

installation dimensions variable

Annexer’s Cartography (*Narrow Road, Deep Chasm*) 2014

brass

2 parts, each 16 x 42 x 40.5 cm

**Amnesiac’s Cartography (Narrow Road, Deep Chasm)**

2014

installation of sculptures made from Tjariji grasses (wild-harvested grasses including minari grass), synthetic polymer paint, wool, raffia, wire, camouflage military garment fabric, cotton and linen thread, bobbins, intricate seeds, bamboo, enus and bush turkeys feathers, buttons and cane teeth, on bilby cans and burnt volumes of the British Museum’s General Catalogue of Printed Books: Ten-year Supplement, 1956–1965

Works by Roma Butler, Yangi Yangi Fox, Pone Kulija, Ninanitja Lewis, Yvonne Lewis, Molly Miller, Angkaliya Nukur, Mary Pan, Sandra Peteman, Tjunka Roberts and Royna Watson courtesy of Tjarpi Desert Weavers and the NPY Women’s Council

Commissioned by TarraWarra Museum of Art for the TarraWarra Biennial 2014: Whisper in My Mask

Burnt books added only for Fiona Hall’s installation in Venice

**Roma Butler**

*Yamphi (Gosses Strick-nest Rat; Leporillus apicalis)* 2014

14 x 11 x 28 cm

**Yangi Yangi Fox**

*Mala (Rufous Hare-wallaby; Lagorchestes hirsutus)* 2014

39 x 38 x 45 cm

**Tjilkamata (Echidna; Tachyglossus aculeatus)* 2014

14 x 17 x 37 cm

**Willy Wagtail (Rhipidura leucophrys) / Tjintir-tjintirpa marangka** 2014

17 x 43 x 28 cm; tin 19.5 x 18 cm diam

**Fiona Hall**

*Mama and Frog / Mamu munu ngaanngi* 2014

55 x 36 x 36 cm; tin 29 x 27 cm diam

**Kuka Irititja (Animals from Another Time)**

2014

installation of sculptures made from Tjariji grasses (wild-harvested grasses including minari grass), synthetic polymer paint, wool, raffia, wire, camouflage military garment fabric, cotton and linen thread, bobbins, intricate seeds, bamboo, enus and bush turkeys feathers, buttons and cane teeth, on bilby cans and burnt volumes of the British Museum’s General Catalogue of Printed Books: Ten-year Supplement, 1956–1965

-list of Works-
Fiona Hall
Born 1953 Sydney, Australia. Lives in Adelaide, Australia.
1973–1975
Diploma of Painting, East Sydney Technical College, Sydney
Selected Solo Exhibitions
1977–1978
Photographic Assistant to Fay Godwin, London, United Kingdom
1979–1982
Master of Fine Arts (Photography), the Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, United States
1987
Artist in Residence, Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania, Hobart
1988–1997
Lecturer in Photo Studies, South Australian School of Art, University of South Australia, Adelaide
1990
Artist in Residence, Phillip Institute of Technology, Melbourne
1997
Artist in Residence, Mount Coot-tha Botanic Gardens, Brisbane, in collaboration with Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane
Creative Arts Fellow, Canberra School of Art, Australian National University, Canberra
1998
Australia Council for the Arts Studio Residency, Ardea Studios, London, United Kingdom
Appointed to Advisory Council, Centre for the Mind, Australian National University, Canberra
1999
Appointed to the Visual Arts/Crafts Board, Australia Council
Académie Residency at the Lumangega Estate, Colombo, Sri Lanka (an extended residency completed in 2009)
Llewelyn Sharp Arts 21 Fellowship, Melbourne
2007
Artist in Residence, Elam International Artist in Residence Program, Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland, New Zealand
Selected Solo Exhibitions
2014, 2011, 2008: Fiona Hall, Force Field, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; City Gallery Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand; Christchurch Art Gallery Toi Puna Waiwhetu, New Zealand; Newcastle Art Gallery, Newcastle
2006
Fiona Hall, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane; Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
1999
A Year Through Paradise, Gallery 706, Colomba, Sri Lanka
1998
Cash Crop, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane
1997
Canberra School of Art, Australian National University, Canberra
1995
Subject to Change, Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide
1994
Garden of Earthly Delights, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Phnom Penh Gallery, Hobart; Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth; Brisbane City Hall, Brisbane
1990
Fiona Hall: Words, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia
1989
Illustration to Dante’s ‘Divine Comedy’, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney; Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne; Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide
1987
Selections from 14 Years: Fiona Hall, Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide
1986
In It He: A Survey of Twelve Years Work, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney
1983
Fiona Hall: Recent Photographs, The Developed Image Gallery, Adelaide; Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney; Vivid Art Gallery, Melbourne
Fiona Hall: Recent Work, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney
1982
Fiona Hall, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney
1981
The Antependium Suite, Tasmanian School of Art Gallery, Hobart
Recent Works, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney
1978
Church Street Photography Centre, Melbourne
1977
Creative Camera Gallery, London, United Kingdom
Public Commissions
2009
Nature Rockabye Garden, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne
2007
Out of Mind, Queensland Brain Institute, Brisbane
2006
A Foil for Mrs Macquarie, commissioned by City of Sydney, Sydney Sculpture Walk, Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney
2005
Bloodline, Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games, Olympic limited edition print and poster commission
1998
Fern Garden, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
1995
Occupied Territory, commission for the opening of the Museum of Sydney, Sydney
Roland 26 x 24 commissions, Camera Project, New York, United States
1984–1988
Parliament House Construction Project, Canberra
1983
CSR Photography Project Collection, Tamul, NSW
Selected Group Exhibitions
2014
Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2014, Kochi, Kerala, India
Tarragona Biennale 2014: Whisper In My Mouth, Tarragona Museum of Art, Tarragona, Spain
2014 Brisbane Biennale of Australian Art: Dark Heart, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
2013
Australia, Royal Academy of Arts, London, United Kingdom
Future Primitive, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne
1998
ANIMAL/HUMAN, University of Queensland Art Museum, Brisbane
Contemporary Australia: Women, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane
2009
ANIMAL/HUMAN, University of Queensland Art Museum, Brisbane
2001
Djalkiri: We are Standing on Their Names: Blue Mud Bay, Nomad Art Productions, Darwin, and interstate tour
DeOverkant/Downunder: Contemporary Sculpture from Australia and the Netherlands, The Hague Sculpture Foundation, The Netherlands
New Nature, Gove Bremer Art Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand (Moor, garden installation)
2008
2006
2006 Contemporary Commonwealth, National Gallery of Victoria and Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Melbourne
Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart
The Third Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art, Moscow, Russia
2008
Uneasy Recent South Australian Art, Anne & Gordon Samstag Museum of Art, Adelaide
The 3rd Auckland Triennial: Turbulence, Auckland, New Zealand
Port Arthur Project: Re-interpreting Port Arthur Historic Site through contemporary visual art, Port Arthur Historic Site, Tasmania (rehearsing ground)
DeOverkant/Downunder: Contemporary Sculpture from Australia and the Netherlands, The Hague Sculpture Foundation, The Netherlands
The 17th Biennale of Sydney: The Beauty of Distance: Songs of Survival in a Precarious Age, Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney (Raspberry at the Gate)
Contemporary Australia: Women, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane
2007
The 7th Biennale of Sydney: The Beauty of Distance: Songs of Survival in a Precarious Age, Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney (Raspberry at the Gate)
2009
The Third Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art, Moscow, Russia
Creative Camera Gallery, London, United Kingdom
ANIMAL/HUMAN, University of Queensland Art Museum, Brisbane
2010
The 17th Biennale of Sydney: The Beauty of Distance: Songs of Survival in a Precarious Age, Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney (Raspberry at the Gate)
2011
ANIMAL/HUMAN, University of Queensland Art Museum, Brisbane
2008
2006 Contemporary Commonwealth, National Gallery of Victoria and Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Melbourne
Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart
The Third Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art, Moscow, Russia
2008
Uneasy Recent South Australian Art, Anne & Gordon Samstag Museum of Art, Adelaide
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New Nature, Gove Bremer Art Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand (Moor, garden installation)
2006
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Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart
The Third Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art, Moscow, Russia
2008
Uneasy Recent South Australian Art, Anne & Gordon Samstag Museum of Art, Adelaide
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New Nature, Gove Bremer Art Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand (Moor, garden installation)
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2008
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DeOverkant/Downunder: Contemporary Sculpture from Australia and the Netherlands, The Hague Sculpture Foundation, The Netherlands
New Nature, Gove Bremer Art Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand (Moor, garden installation)
2005
MCA Collection: New Acquisitions in Context, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

Strangely Familiar, with Fiona MacDonnell, University of Technology Sydney Gallery, Sydney

2004
Living Together is Easy, Contemporary Art Centre, Art Tower Mito, Mito Arts Foundation, Mito-shi, Japan; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

More Easily Imagined: Crossings of the Blue Mountains, Bathurst Regional Art Gallery, Bathurst, NSW

2003
Face Up: Contemporary Art from Australia, Museum of the Present, Nationalgalerie im Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, Germany

Flagship: Australian Art in the National Gallery of Victoria, 1970–2000, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Nature and Nation: Vanier’s Empire, Heaths Museum & Art Gallery, East Sussex, United Kingdom

2002
2nd Eight: Australian Photography in the National Gallery of Victoria, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Convex: where art + science meet, Adelaide Biennale, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

Fieldworks: Australian Art 1986–2002, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

The First Twenty Years: Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

2001
The Art of Transformation, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Federations: Australian Art and Society 1901–2001, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Unpacking Europe, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, The Netherlands; Haus des Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, Germany

2000
The 12th Biennale of Sydney (2000), Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

1999
2nd Eight: Australian Photography in the National Gallery of Victoria, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

The Gothic, Perversity and its Pleasure, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane

Some Provincial Myths: Recent Art from Adelaide, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, Adelaide

Australian National University, Canberra

Archives and the Everyday, Canberra School of Art Gallery, Australian National University, Canberra

Contemporary Art Award, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (winner inaugural Contemporary Art Award)

The Exotic Mixed Object, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

1998
Art Across Oceans (Container ’98), Copenhagen, Denmark

Art Cologne Internationaler Kunstmarkt, Messe- und Ausstellungs-Gesellschaft m.b.H., Köln, Germany

Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

Colonial Post Colonial, Museum of Modern Art at Heide, Melbourne

How Say You, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne

Photography is Dead! Long Live Photography! Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, The Netherlands; Haus des Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, Germany

1997
The Power to Move: Aspects of Australian Photography, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

The Object of Existence, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne

Adelaide Installations: Incorporating the 1994 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, Adelaide (Biocentre)

Locality of Dispossession: Contemporary Art in an International World, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

The Temple of Flora, Waverley City Gallery, Melbourne

The 4th Biennale of Sydney: Vision in Disbelief, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

1996
The 3rd Biennale of Sydney (1996), Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

Queen’s Wharf Photographs, Sydney; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; The University of Melbourne, Melbourne

Art Across Oceans (Container ’96), Copenhagen, Denmark

1994
Australian Perspecta 1994: Between Art and Nature, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

1993
Art Discos: Exposure D’Art Contemporain Australien, Konrad Melowander Centre, Noumea, New Caledonia

1991
Australian Photography: The 1980s, Australian National Gallery, Canberra

From the Sublime to the Sordid, Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide

1990
Archives and the Everyday, Canberra School of Art Gallery, Australian National University, Canberra

Contemporary Art Award, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Art from Australia: Eight Contemporary Views, Anaklini traveling exhibition touring southeast Asia

1989
Time Present and Time Past, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Sydney

Fiona Hall, David Blount, Brian Thompson, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Sydney

1988
Australian Photography: The 1980s, Australian National Gallery, Canberra, and interstate tour

Recent South Australian Art: New Acquisitions, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

South Australia Photographed, College Gallery, South Australian School of Art, Adelaide

Constructing Images: Photographs of Parliament House, The Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra

Some Provincial Myths: Recent Art from Adelaide, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, Adelaide, and interstate tour

1987
In Full View: An Exhibition of 20 x 24 Polaroid Photographs, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, and interstate tour

The Gothic, Perversity and its Pleasure, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane; 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne; Chameleon Galleries, Hobart

Australian National Gallery, Canberra

1986
Australian Photography: The 1970s, Australian National Gallery, Canberra

Selected Public Collections

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

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Further Reading

Taste by Fiona Hall


Rafael, Susan, Leilah: An Exhibition by Fiona Hall, exh. cat., Anzali, Melbourne and The Lunapage Trust, Colombia, 2002.


Books and exhibition catalogues


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Major Partner
The Balnaves Foundation has supported Australia’s representation at the Venice Biennale since 2007. Founded in 2006 by Neil Balnaves AO, the Foundation disperses over $2.5 million per annum to organisations that aim to create a better Australia through education, medicine and the arts with a focus on young people, the disadvantaged and Indigenous communities.

In the arts, the Foundation partners with a number of key visual and performing arts organisations in Australia. The Foundation funds the main prize for the McClelland Sculpture Survey at the McClelland Gallery and Sculpture Park in Melbourne, a free teenage program at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia in Sydney and a children’s program at the Art Gallery of South Australia. The Foundation also funds projects at the Art Gallery of New South Wales and provides financial support to Kaldor Public Art Projects. In the performing arts the Foundation supports the production of Indigenous plays at Belvoir Street Theatre in Sydney, a project that funds young choreographers to produce work at Sydney Dance Company and a program at the Sydney Opera House that subsidises tickets so socially and economically disadvantaged families can attend performances for just $5 a ticket.

The Balnaves Foundation is proud to again be the Major Partner for Australia’s representation at the Venice Biennale 2015.

Supporting Partner
Maddocks provides premium legal services to corporations, businesses and governments throughout Australia and internationally. We advise national clients across education, government, infrastructure, healthcare, professional services and technology sectors from our Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney offices. With more than 500 people, we aim to work together to make a difference... every day.

Maddocks is committed to supporting the contemporary arts. As the first Australian corporate sponsor for the Venice Biennale, the firm has supported Australian artists exhibiting at the world’s premier contemporary art event since 2001.

We seek to have our partners and people engage with art in a way that brings our community closer together. Our vision as a firm is to be acknowledged for innovation, and as nurturing a culture of collaboration, respect and diversity.

The Maddocks Art Prize enables an emerging Australian artist to attend the Venice Biennale. The prize will be awarded to a recipient in both Sydney and Melbourne—accommodation and a stipend for a week in Venice. The winners of the 2015 Maddocks Art Prize will be announced in March.

Supporting Partner
The White Rabbit Gallery is a not-for-profit private museum in Sydney, Australia. Opened to showcase Judith Neilson’s vast collection of twenty-first-century Chinese contemporary art, the White Rabbit Gallery aims to make contemporary art accessible to all.

The Neilson Foundation and the White Rabbit Gallery are proud to support Australia’s contribution to the 2015 Venice Biennale. With its unique position as the world’s oldest Biennale, Venice is one of the most important locations for fresh, exciting contemporary art.
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