



Education Kit

Introduction

Transformers: More Than Meets The Eye brings together work by artists featured in the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Art Collection with work by artists currently studying at QUT, to explore how artists transform everyday objects and materials beyond their original form and function into works of art. Twelve artists are represented, with work by seven QUT Art Collection artists (**Stephen Baxter, Eugene Carchesio, Rosalie Gascoigne, Robert Klippel, Merv Muhling, Bruce Reynolds and Madonna Staunton**) and five QUT students (**Rodolphe Blois, Luke Jaaniste, Alice Lang, Kathryn McSherry and Cerae Mitchell**).

The exhibition engages with a long history of collage and assemblage, the readymade and the found object, yet it also moves beyond these terms and questions the authenticity of the original. Many contemporary artists use readymade source material in one form or another; be it the painter who works from a magazine photo or the digital artist who creates a montage of images drawn from popular culture. These practices are not a new phenomenon but have a rich history that spans back to the Cubists and before. In the early 20th century, artists such as Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque introduced everyday materials into the painted picture plane in an attempt to blur the boundaries between life and high art. Artists such as Marcel Duchamp challenged conventions by exhibiting readymade objects bought from department stores and signed by the artist. Many artists associated with various movements throughout art history, including Dada, Arte Povera and Conceptual Art, have confronted previously held beliefs about what constitutes a work of art, by incorporating non-traditional and found materials.

Why do you think artists use everyday materials within their works?

Research Marcel Duchamp and his use of readymade objects, in particular search for a work called 'Fountain'. How did Duchamp change conceptions of what it means to be an artist? How did Duchamp's 'Fountain' challenge traditional notions of what constitutes an artwork? In 100 words explain why or why not Duchamp's readymades are art objects.

In 100 words outline your definition of what art is.

Luke Jaaniste (b. 1977) works with both readymade sites and materials. Using existing spaces as his canvas Jaaniste performs subtle interventions to draw attention to architectural features. His art supplies include non-precious materials such as sticky tape, Lego and materials found in situ. The form of Jaaniste's work is determined by the internal logic of a site and the material he utilises. The majority of his work employs the serial arrangement of one thing after another. With his sticky tape installations the distance between strips is equal to the width of the tape, and the number of strips is related to features within the space. For this exhibition Jaaniste has created a series of site-specific works particular to the structural design of QUT Art Museum. Jaaniste's works are ephemeral. At the end of the exhibition they will be dismantled and will survive via documentation.



Do you think Jaaniste's works are art? In 100 words argue your opinion.

Luke Jaaniste

Sticky taping (on walkway railing) (Detail) 2004
 QUT Art Museum east ramp and clear sticky tape
 Courtesy of the artist

Eugene Carchesio's (b. 1960) constructions are intimate in scale and explore notions of architectural space, spirituality, creative energy, art history and the concept of the museum. Carchesio's practice often focuses on geometric forms, such as the circle, triangle and their combined product the cone. Uniting these forms with the simplicity of matchboxes he creates assisted readymades which refer to art history and the artist's personal symbology. The cone reflects a number of ideas; it can produce, distil and transmit sound or energy. It can also be used as a filter to concentrate and amplify matter. *The empty house* series demonstrates Carchesio's characteristic exploration of geometric shapes, patterning and opticality. The shadow effects created by the folded circles in *The empty house IV* (2004) are integral to the work and blur the definition between paper and ground.

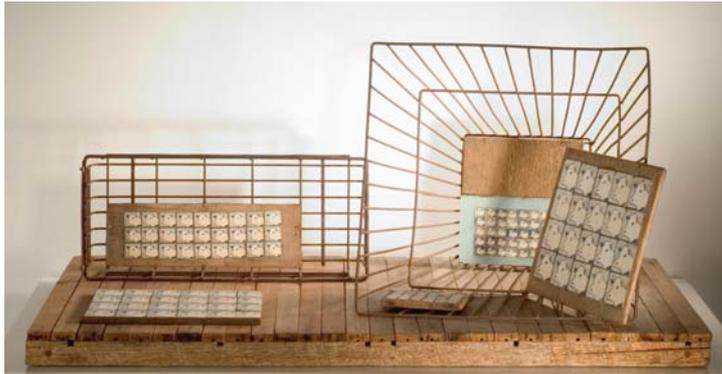
Carchesio's work often refers to art history movements and other artists. Looking at Carchesio's matchbox works what references can you identify?



Eugene Carchesio

Untitled (Detail) 1995-96
 12 matchbox constructions and paper cone on cardboard
 Purchased 2002 with the assistance of Betty Quelhurst
 QUT Art Collection

The art of **Rosalie Gascoigne** (1917-1999) evokes the essence of nature and the unique Australian landscape through the reconfiguration of the debris of society. Gascoigne often discovered her art materials on walks throughout the countryside or visits to the local refuse station when she would collect old road signs, crates, lost feathers and other abandoned objects. For Gascoigne the selection of material was as important as the process of creation and she hunted for weathered fragments imbued with the essence of the land. In *Grassfest* (1999) Gascoigne deconstructed soft drink crates and rearranged the slats to explore repetition. The work alludes to the sun-kissed, dry grass planes the artist experienced in the countryside south of Canberra.



Rosalie Gascoigne
Winter order 1979
 Weathered timber, plywood, two rusty wire baskets and cut and pasted reproductions
 Purchased 1980, QUT Art Collection

How has Gascoigne used found materials to evoke the atmosphere of the Australian landscape? Can you identify any of her source materials?

Gascoigne often employed repetition within her compositions. What other elements of design can you identify?

Robert Klippel (1920-2001) worked across mediums including drawing and sculpture and utilised various materials from wood and metal machine parts to magazines and photographs. *Number 679* (1987) is a bronze cast of a sculpture fashioned from discarded timber. The aura unique to second-hand goods is removed from the work in the transference to bronze and the new media lends the sculpture a solid industrial presence. Klippel had an inimitable language of forms which resonates throughout his oeuvre. In the collage *Untitled* (1981) he layered transparent self-adhesive paper in a manner reminiscent of his sculptural assemblages. Indeed, Klippel was very much a sculptor at heart and his works on paper are definitively three-dimensional in character.

Compare Klippel's collages with his sculpture. What similarities and differences can you see?

Klippel often used juxtaposition within his constructions. Study Klippel's works and identify any contrasting features. What might they convey?

Hint: Think about organic and mechanical forms



Robert Klippel
Number 679 1987
 Bronze
 Purchased 1998, QUT Art Collection

Madonna Staunton (b. 1938) has worked with painting, collage and, like Gascoigne, assemblage. Staunton often combines new and found materials in order to create meanings and suggestions. *Assemblage I-IV* (1981) embodies the dictum that 'less is more' and demonstrates Staunton's economical use of form. The wooden relics within this piece have been carefully positioned according to Staunton's unique intuition and exude a warmth characteristic of worn materials. Her method of working is strongly instinctive and draws upon both Eastern and Western philosophy, in particular Zen Buddhism. Staunton's works reflect the Zen ideal that Enlightenment is to be found in the commonplace, in emptiness or non-attachment.



Madonna Staunton

Assemblage I-IV 1981. Painted wood, metal and coloured paper.
Purchased 1984, QUT Art Collection

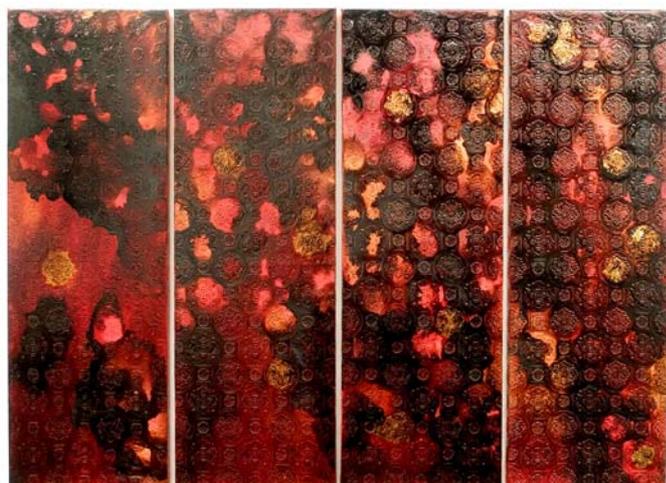
Research definitions for collage, bricolage and assemblage. What do you think these practices are and how are they similar or different?

One of Staunton's works is called *Assemblage I-IV*. Would you classify this work as assemblage; why? why not? What other works in *Transformers* could be called assemblage?

While decorative furnishings are usually employed to change what they conceal, **Kathryn McSherry** (b. 1963) reverses this function by covering and eliminating wallpaper patterns. With *Interior 1* (2004) the artist passed four panels of embossed wallpaper through a printing press at different pressures to progressively flatten the design on each successive panel. The wallpaper was then stretched over canvas and used as a base for painterly exploration into tone and interior spaces. This 'painting over' is another process of hiding the pattern, yet it also highlights particular decorative features. In another twist, McSherry confuses the role of wallpaper as interior décor, displaying it as a painting on the wall as opposed to a pattern applied to the wall. McSherry's concerns include the history of decoration in art, the origins of wallpaper design features and their signification of past cultures.

What type of atmosphere or interior does the work to the right convey? What elements suggest this?

How does McSherry transform wallpaper into an artwork? What devices does she use?



Kathryn McSherry

Interior 1 2004
Synthetic polymer paint, bitumen and gold leaf on wallpaper stretched over canvas
Courtesy of the artist

Bruce Reynolds (b. 1955) explores the crossovers between decoration, architecture and art in the employment of decorative vestiges of the past such as linoleum. Unwanted remnants of once ubiquitous lino are given new life by Reynolds, who creates montages that issue a challenge to traditional questions of taste. Works such as *Peninsula* (1994) and *Côte de mode* (1992) invoke nostalgia for a time in Australian history when lino flooring material was in vogue. Further, the material evokes memories beyond its role as floor covering and suggests entire interiors and the atmosphere of particular houses.



Reynolds was trained as a painter. How do his linoleum works relate to a painting tradition? Think about landscape painting in Australia for example

Look at the patterns Reynolds has used. Do you recognise any? If so, where are they from and what might they represent?

Bruce Reynolds

Peninsula 1994

Linoleum and enamel on plywood

Purchased 1994, QUT Art Collection

Alice Lang (b. 1983) reworks traditional craft and sewing materials into soft sculptures which comment on these stereotypically feminine pursuits and explore the capacity of glamour to engage with the realm of the fantastical grotesque. A selection of Lang's fabrics are drawn from her mother's collection of sewing paraphernalia while others are store bought, rescued from their potential future as formal dresses and transformed into amorphous creatures suggestive of taxidermy gone wrong. Lang's work lures the viewer with its materiality, while its abject form simultaneously repels.

Lang's practice relates to a feminist tradition of critiquing women's place in society.

Research other artists who use fabric and sewing processes to create art. Compare and contrast their work with Lang's.

Hint: See Claes Oldenburg



Alice Lang

A bird is assembled 2004

Fur fabric, satin, wire, wadding and vinyl

Courtesy of the artist

There is a museological impetus behind **Cerae Mitchell's** (b. 1981) investigation into the natural world through the accumulation of both organic and inorganic samples for her idiosyncratic collections. Mitchell values both natural and synthetic objects as demonstrated in her bottled specimens, which resemble a modern cabinet of curiosities with preserved insects catalogued alongside plastic horses. Mitchell's deep concern for the environment means her inorganic specimens are often objects of refuse she has removed from the roadside. Her growing collection is categorised not by any formal logic but rather by narrative and poetic impulse. Mitchell cites Joseph Cornell and David Attenborough as diverse influences on her exploration of the natural world and the world of the museum.



How does Mitchell's work employ signifiers of museum or gallery displays? How does her work differ from these standards?

Can you identify any narratives and relationships at play within *Reference*?

Research the Wunderkammer, which means 'cabinet of curiosities'. How do modern museums differ from this historical origin?

Cerae Mitchell

Reference (Detail) 2004. Mixed media. Courtesy of the artist

Stephen Baxter (b. 1962) does not always directly use found objects; rather his constructions are at times influenced by found source material. Baxter works in a variety of mediums including ceramics, painting, drawing and digital media. His ceramics explore how functional objects can elude categorisation and become works of art. *Twentieth century dinosaur* is fashioned from objects which are like barnacles attaching themselves to a ship, growing into and out of the vase, transforming it into something above and beyond a merely decorative vessel. From pink snails to green and red polka dot roosters, the attached objects have been cast in pre-made moulds, sourced from ceramic fragments and inspired by found bric-a-brac and items discovered in craft outlets. Baxter animates these objects through vibrant colour and patterning, and creates a playful bricolage of everyday life.

The title *Twentieth century dinosaur* is paradoxical for it suggests both a modern dinosaur and relics of the twentieth century. What do you think the title of this work means? What is the artist suggesting about the twentieth century and the attached objects?

Look at his other works. How do they challenge traditional functions of objects such as teapots?

Stephen Baxter

Twentieth century dinosaur 1993
White earthenware, slip cast and hand built with underglaze decoration, clear glaze, gold lustre and decals
Purchased 1993 with the assistance of the Visual Arts/Craft Board of the Australia Council
QUT Art Collection



The work of **Rodolphe Blois** (b. 1956) and **Merv Muhling** (1929-2003) is similar in its employment of natural objects. Blois is concerned with the relationship between culture and nature and the impact each has on the other. He collects twigs and branches and arranges them either irregularly (like mini-forests as in *Resilience 1*, 2003) or in an orderly fashion that visually demonstrates the restraints society often places upon nature (*Resilience 2*, 2003). In contrast to this, Merv Muhling's *Case moth* (n.d) conveys how nature, and species such as case moths, can be just as ordered as society. In Blois' practice the natural (twig) is often combined with the industrial (paint) evoking a sense of humankind's inhabitation of the earth. This painting over the natural is taken to the extreme in pieces such as *Conquered* (2002) where a row of brushwood is painted in three sections of colour; red, white and blue. The work makes obvious references to the French flag and the artist's heritage but Blois notes that the flags of most countries can be reduced to these three base colours. Hence, it refers to universal notions of the domination of culture over nature and of particular cultures over others.

Merv Muhling's practice involved everything from jewellery to metal constructions. Natural forms were often a source of inspiration for Muhling, in particular the case moth species provided the stimulus for much of his late-career output. His works in this exhibition follow various stages of the lifecycle of a moth, from cocoon to full flight. The pieces demonstrate the empathy the artist had with nature, explore notions of fragility, mutability and resilience and suggest the process of metamorphosis.



Left: **Rodolphe Blois**
Resilience 1 2003
 Twigs and papier mâché
 Courtesy of the artist

Resilience (above) is made from incorporating twigs in layers of papier mâché created from newspapers. What do you think this juxtaposition suggests?

Compare and contrast the work of Blois and Muhling. What ideas do they explore that are similar? How have they used nature to convey different concerns?



Right: **Merv Muhling**
Untitled (About moths)
 1991
 Eucalypt twigs, wattle, papier
 mâché and plywood
 Purchased 1992, QUT Art
 Collection