Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
University of Technology Sydney

# The Art of Dwelling:
# Making with the material of lived-in places

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Doctor of Creative Arts
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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I, Emma Wise, declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Creative Arts, in the School of Communication, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution. This research is supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program.

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THESIS FORMAT

This ‘thesis including creative work’ comprises documentation of the creative component works through text and images and links incorporated into a written thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

**Abstract**

This research examines how contemporary artists in Australia have engaged with the material of lived-in places in their artworks. It focuses on artists who have exhibited work in and in response to actual houses, or played with the materiality of the house itself in their work, using houses soon to be demolished, or bits of them, or stuff that has come out of houses. Through an interrogation of my own practice and the practice of others, the research examines the relationships among site, material and artist practice in the making of these works, and how the power of the site and what artists bring to the work – a 'toolbox' of familiar materials and practices, including their processes of discovery – combine in this kind of emergent practice to influence what is created. It examines these relationships through three modes of making with the material of lived-in places: making through dwelling – when an artist spends time dwelling in a place through an artist residency or shorter site visits; making with an artist's belongings brought from home; and making with unoccupied houses often slated for demolition.

The research argues that the differing influences of site, material and artist practice shift from work to work and artist to artist, as might be expected, although there are commonalities within different modes of working. The amount of time spent dwelling in a site can influence the work produced there – an artist residency can result in work greatly influenced by the site, while a short site visit can result in more reliance on an artist's toolbox. The work also depends upon a combination of the artist's attention and the power of the peripheral.

This new knowledge will help art historians and artists themselves better understand this type of responsive art practice. Curators and those who commission artists will better understand how artists engage with site and material, especially in relation to lived-in places, and this can guide how they curate and commission work. Organisations running residencies often require detailed proposals, which take time to write and to consider; however, this research argues that the influence of the site on the work through the time spent dwelling there indicates that specific proposals for residencies may be a waste of time, and a better method – already employed by some organisations, such as The Mattress Factory in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania – is to simply ask for documentation of previous practice, trusting the artist to create work of the expected standard.

## Introduction

Walking up the drive of the fairly ordinary looking home on Mugga Way in Canberra's Red Hill in 2004, it was hard not to feel like I was visiting my grandmother and would soon be greeted with rock cakes and a cup of tea. The relatively modest single-storey house still looked lived in, the garden tended, the paths trimmed. There was probably someone checking tickets or taking money at the gate or front door, but that's not how I remember that visit to Calthorpes Contemporary, a contemporary art exhibition in heritage-listed Calthorpes' House, built in 1927 for the Calthorpe family and now one of the Australian Capital Territory's 'historic places'. I stepped from the bright Canberra sunlight into the dark interior, all period furniture, carpets, and wooden sash windows.

Exhibitions in historic houses can be like treasure hunts, especially group exhibitions. What have the artists decided to make? Have they responded to the place or brought in a piece of work from their studio practice with little consideration of the house? I remember feeling most of the artworks in that Calthorpes exhibition didn't have much connection to where they were, with one exception. I didn't notice the work at first, but heading back out through the living room I saw a television that seemed to be on tucked into a corner. The house is a mix of largely original 1927 furnishings with some later additions, so the mid-century cabinet television didn't appear out of place. At first the image on the screen looked like a still, an image of a house and garden on a suburban road. But the light in the image was changing, and as I watched I realised it was a video of the house we were in, Calthorpes' House, taken from across Mugga Way as dusk fell. It was slow television before slow television. The only change was the gradual fading of the light. No-one walked past. There was no birdsong, or any soundtrack at all that I remember. No lights went on, and soon the darkness was complete.

The work spoke to the quietude of the place, to its preservation, to time past and time passing. The silent vigil of the video maker echoed the silent vigil of the unoccupied house. Here was an utterly compelling and yet near-invisible work. Other visitors seemed oblivious, and if they hesitated as they passed to see what I was looking at, it was momentary, for the change from daylight to dusk to darkness in the video was

incremental. There was no movement on the screen to catch the eye, no narrative beyond the passage of time to hold a viewer.

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This research investigates how contemporary artists in Australia, such as Cathy Laudenbach and Kimmo Vennonen, the creators of that Calthorpes' House video work (*Daisy Chain Days* 2004), have engaged with the materiality of lived-in places. By this I mean Australian artists, including myself, or non-Australian artists working in Australia, who have explored or been invited to work outside the gallery and who have exhibited work in, and in response to, actual lived-in places – historic houses filled with the detritus of past lives, empty houses with only traces of occupancy remaining, houses still lived in, caravans – or who have played with the materiality of the house itself in their work, often using houses soon to be demolished, or bits of homes, or stuff that has come out of them. The research includes works made in the gardens of these domains, for gardens can be integral to the lived-in fabric of a house or a home. Through an interrogation of my own practice and the practice of others, the research examines the relationships among site, material and artist practice in the making of these works, and how the power of the site and what artists bring to the work – a 'toolbox' of familiar materials and practices and their processes of discovery – combine in this kind of emergent practice to influence what is created.

The term 'contemporary art' is defined differently by different participants in the art world, which is indicative of the looseness that surrounds this term. The Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney 'only acquires work directly from artists or their representatives' with a focus on key Australian artworks made 'over the past ten years' and a strong commitment to collecting significant contemporary work by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists; however, its holdings include the foundational JW Power Collection and other collections held in trust or donated, with works dating back decades before the museum's first formal acquisitions in 1989.[1] The New Museum in New York City was set up in 1977 as a centre for contemporary art 'made within a period of approximately ten years prior to the present' by living artists without wide

[1] https://www.mca.com.au/artists-works/collection/how-and-why-we-collect-artworks/.

recognition, however this mission has loosened over time to include recently deceased artists and artists with significant profiles.[2] For the purposes of this thesis, I embrace the flexibility of the definition on the website of the Tate galleries in London: 'The term contemporary art is loosely used to refer to art of the present day and of the relatively recent past, of an innovatory or avant-garde nature.'[3]

My focus on contemporary art means I will not be discussing the artworks made over thousands of years by the indigenous artists of this land in what appears to be a response to both an interior world and the actual world around them – etched into and painted and drawn and stencilled onto rock in and near occupation shelters, scratched into smoke blackened bark on the inside of bark dwellings (Taçon and Davies 2004; Willis 2007). Nevertheless, the artists and works that I do discuss operate in the context of the human habitation of this continent for more than 65,000 years, and the proliferation of these images throughout what we now call Australia, including at highly significant sites in the Wollemi wilderness just north of where I live in the Blue Mountains behind Sydney (Taçon et al. 2019).

The question at the centre of this research is:

> How have contemporary artists in Australia engaged with the material of lived-in places in their works; more specifically, what are the relationships among site, material and artist practice in the making of such works?

With this core question driving the research, the three central chapters of the thesis investigate three different methods of artist engagement with the material of lived-in places, introducing additional research questions as follows:

> Chapter 1: Making through Dwelling
> How do the forces of attention and the power of the peripheral operate in art practices where the artist spends time dwelling in the art-making site?

[2] https://www.newmuseum.org/history.
[3] https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/c/contemporary-art.

Chapter 2: Inside Out
How does Jane Bennett's concept of 'thing power' operate in works artists make from stuff they bring from home?

Chapter 3: To-be-demolished, Abandoned or Empty
When a complete house is abandoned, empty or to be demolished and all or part of it becomes an artwork, what becomes of home?

Discussion of the creative component of this research, my own work, is embedded in chapters 1 & 2 in order to contextualise my practice within the practices of the other contemporary Australian artists working in these ways. My practice has yet to encompass an intervention in the fabric of an entire dwelling as in the work discussed in chapter 3.

My discussion of the house as material in contemporary art practice is framed by three concepts in cultural theory and philosophy that can be related to artistic practice in this context. The first is German philosopher Martin Heidegger's work on dwelling and his argument that dwelling both 'takes on an abode' and takes time, which informs my discussion around how time spent in a place, particularly through artist residencies, informs the work made in that place (Heidegger, 1996, p. 20). The second is US political theorist and philosopher Jane Bennett's concept of vibrant matter and her argument for the agency of objects, which I draw on in my discussion of the role a site has in determining the art made in it, arguing that for the artist this involves the dual forces of attention and what I call the power of the peripheral. The third is French philosopher Gaston Bachelard's proposal that we bring our home, our 'lares' with us, wherever we go; with this in mind, I introduce what I call an artist's 'toolbox' of materials and ways of working that an artist regularly mobilises.

The literature addressing the intersection of contemporary art in Australia and the house as material is limited. To my knowledge there has been no research that focuses on how contemporary artists from or working in Australia engage with the materiality of actual houses. Furthermore, when scholars do examine contemporary art in this context, they do not focus on the relationships among site, material and artist practice in the making of these works, revealing a gap in the research waiting to be filled.

Two British scholars have written separate books examining contemporary art and the house (and home), both claiming it to be an under-researched area: Gill Perry, *Playing at Home: The House in Contemporary Art* (2013) and Imogen Racz *Art and the Home: Comfort, Alienation and the Everyday* (2015). Perry focuses on installation art that engages with the theme of home and 'the motif of the house' in Britain, Europe and the US (p. 9). Racz examines mostly three-dimensional work (object-based work and installation) by 'post–World War II artists' from or working in the US and Britain who have made work that manifests ideas of home, domesticity and dwelling (p. 4). Both books are broad surveys largely discussing artists and artworks that engage with the themes of house and home. When they do discuss works that incorporate the materiality of houses, they do not focus on the relationships among material, site and artist practice. Furthermore, despite their breadth, neither author includes artworks or artists from or working in Australia. While the theme of Perry's chapter 5, 'Haunted Houses', is not closely aligned with much of the present research, the chapter does focus on artists that have used existing houses in their work and I use her comments on how such works can evoke ghosts and 'enable an uncomfortable collision between history, death and domesticity' (p. 143) in my discussion of Tracey Moffatt's house installation work *A Haunting* 2021 (see chapter 3), for which an empty farmhouse beside a road in rural NSW is lit from within with pulsing red light every night from 6pm until 6am the next morning.

In *Home* (2006), scholars Alison Blunt (London) and Robyn Dowling (Sydney) provide a study guide to home and domesticity described as 'a critical geography of home' (p. 2). In the chapter 'Representing Home' there is a section on 'The home and art' (pp. 58–74) that, as the chapter title suggests, is mainly concerned with artists' representations of home rather than their engagement with the materiality of houses and homes. The chapter does include a mention of Michael Landy's *Break Down* (2001), for which Landy 'shredded all his possessions over a two-week period' (p. 61), and a short discussion of Rachel Whiteread's *House* (1993) that focuses on the traces of domesticity revealed through an inversion of the interior space of home rather than the relationships among artist practice, materiality and site.[4] The book also briefly addresses

[4] I discuss both in subsequent chapters when contextualising relevant artwork in Australia.

(pp. 65–66) performance art in homes in Britain – Bobby Baker's *Kitchen Show* (first performed 1991) and Laura Godfrey Isaacs' *Home* (1998–c.2005) – stating that it raises 'important questions about the performativity of home and domesticity, but also about relationships between art and the home' (p. 65) with little further discussion. Quoting from Isaacs' then website for the project (lgihome.co.uk), Blunt and Dowling describe how the artist/curator/resident used her own home as a 'radical new performance art space' where 'rather than clearing rooms so they operate as a white space, artists make use of the living environment of the house to inform inspire and provide a context for their work'. The single work the authors mention is an example from Isaac's salon series One to One (January–March 2005) – *A Day of Domestic Bliss*, an interactive work where the house was open all day and visitors could choose whether to have their laundry washed, ironing done or have a cup of tea with an artist. With the advent of the smartphone, performing the domestic at home has become ubiquitous online and, despite the differences between actual and online experiences, it is perhaps no coincidence that these artists have subsequently moved away from working directly with house and home in their practices.[5] Despite Dowling hailing from Sydney, the authors do not discuss works by Australian artists or by artists working in Australia.

Literature that does address this type of art in the Australian context is limited. Australian art historian Chris McAuliffe notes in *Art and Suburbia* (1999) that 'It is now the norm rather than the exception, for artists to address the suburbs in the course of their work. Art history is also, now, more inclined to consider the suburbs and a history of suburban imagery' (p. 12). However, McAuliffe's study is mostly concerned with two-dimensional representations of Australia suburbia and all the works considered are gallery based, such as Tracey Moffatt's 1994 series of photolithographs Scarred for Life, which features scenarios located in a range of suburban environments, including the interiors of houses. *Art and Suburbia* does include some installations, and Glen D. Clarke's arrangement of various backyard items in a gallery space to create *Reductio ad Absurdum* 1994 is the closest McAuliffe comes to an artist's engagement

[5] Isaacs has become a midwife and describes herself as 'artist, midwife and birth activist' (see lauragodfreyisaacs.com), and Baker leads the organisation Daily Life Ltd, making art that 'explores and celebrates everyday life and human behaviour' (https://www.dailylifeltd.co.uk/) but apparently not in houses and homes. Bobby Baker's website referenced in Blunt and Dowling (2006) (bobbybakersdailylife.com) was superseded by a youtube channel 'dailylifeltd' https://www.youtube.com/channel/UClsGYKTWeCyhuRzxXPSDkvg, on which there is a video of *Kitchen Show* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RIbzhmljz_k.

with the materiality of house (see chapter 2 'Inside Out' for a discussion of artworks incorporating the contents of houses). Australian artist and scholar Malcom Bywaters (2012) discusses the 'representation of the domestic house and home' in contemporary Australian visual art between 1945 and 2012, specifically how he and three other artists have interpreted the domestic dwelling. Of the four artists, only Lyndal Jones, through her Avoca Project, works directly with the material of lived-in places, and Bywaters doesn't analyse the Avoca Project in terms of the engagement of Jones and the artists in residence with the fabric of the house and surrounds (for my own discussion of the Avoca Project see chapter 1).

Exhibitions at public institutions in Australia have also focused on suburbia and ideas of 'home'. Casula Powerhouse curated Fibro: A Devotion to Suburb, which included an array of recreated (or real?) mid-century garage tilt-a-doors and a patch of lawn, for Australian Perspecta 1997: Between Art & Nature (Millner 1999, p. 163). Home, a 2000 exhibition at the Art Gallery of Western Australia in Perth was curated 'without regard to the limitations of national boundaries' (p. 7), but none of the resultant work incorporated the materiality of the house. Exhibitions in 2019 included The Ideal Home at Penrith Regional Gallery, and the associated 'Home is where the heart is' exhibition of artist responses to the idea of home at the Lewers House Gallery, the house where Margo and Gerald Lewers first lived on the property. The House Gallery is empty of furniture and the rooms are painted white, so the space tends to be used as an imperfect white cube, but for this exhibition eX De Medici moved beyond her house room space to create an installation in the bath house next to the House Gallery, which did directly respond to that room. The Housing Question, also at Penrith Regional Gallery, an exhibition of work by Helen Grace and Narelle Jubelin with Sherre DeLys, included works shown in the Lewers House Gallery that, according to the gallery website, 'resonate with the original house on this site', referencing in particular some bronzes cast from cardboard packaging forms that were displayed in all of the gallery spaces and a courtyard.[6] Also in 2019, the State Library of Queensland presented Home: A Suburban Obsession, an exhibition based around a vast collection of photographs taken by a travelling commercial photographer of houses in south-west Queensland in the

[6] https://www.penrithregionalgallery.com.au/events/the-housing-question/.

1960s and 1970s, and with work by four contemporary artists, including photographs by Ian Strange (see chapter 3).

The next chapter will discuss making art through dwelling across different timeframes and in unoccupied houses. It is divided into three sections and examines work made during artist residencies, work made after short site visits, and work made in unlived-in houses, such as historic houses that are open to the public as museums. Unoccupied houses slated for demolition offer artists the opportunity to significantly disturb the structure of a house, and such works are discussed separately in chapter 3.

## Chapter 1 Making through dwelling

Most of my work whether in a gallery or elsewhere is site responsive,[7] and I have an ongoing interest in the relationship between site and practice, which is integral to the art of dwelling at the centre of this research. I use the term 'site responsive' out of the many terms that have arisen since the anti-commercial 'site-specific' art of the 1960s and '70s because, unlike 'site specific', 'site-oriented' or 'site-related', 'site responsive' activates the practice of the artist. This chapter examines what happens in terms of the relationships among site, material and practice when an artist dwells in a place in the process of making a site-responsive work. Furthermore, the chapter discusses how the forces of attention and the power of the peripheral operate when artists practise this kind of making/dwelling.

Scholar and curator Miwon Kwon, in her 2002 text *One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity*, writes that it 'seems historically inevitable that we will leave behind the nostalgic notion of a site and identity as essentially bound to the physical actualities of a place' (p. 164), referring to the expansion of the idea of site in the decades since the 1970s to encompass sociocultural and discursive realms. In the twenty years since Kwon wrote this, however, artists have not abandoned the process of dwelling in a place and making work that is bound to the physical actualities of that place, as can be seen in the practices of the artists I discuss in this research. The dwelling I am talking about here can take the form of becoming an artist-in-residence and living in the place for a time, or a site visit, which is usually shorter, sometimes just a few hours, and therefore more intense, especially if the place is far from home. According to Heidegger:

> 'Dwelling' is practically and technically regarded as the possession of accommodation and housing. Such things indeed belong to dwelling, yet they do not fulfill or ground its essence. Dwelling takes on an abode and is an abiding in such an abode, specifically that of human beings upon this earth. The abode is a whiling. It needs a while. (1996, p. 20)

[7] See my website at https://emmawise.com.au/.

For the purposes of this research, the first key point Heidegger makes here is that dwelling 'takes on an abode', which can be regarded as the influence of the site on the type of dwelling an artist practises when making an artwork in response to that site. Jane Bennett goes further in her examination of 'the material agency or effectivity of nonhuman or not-quite human things' in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010), which belongs to what is loosely called 'the material turn' or 'the new materialism'.[8] She calls this agency of objects 'thing power' (p. ix), even going so far as to describe 'the capacity of things…to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own' (p. viii). Gaston Bachelard also seems to acknowledge a kind of 'thing power', or at least an exchange of influence between house and occupant, when he writes in *The Poetics of Space* (1958/2014), that 'A house that has been experienced is not an inert box. Inhabited space transcends geometrical space' (p. 67). In discussing my own works and the works of other artists, I argue in support of this notion of 'thing power' as it manifests in the influence a site has on the work made in response to it.

When talking about thing power Bennett notes that 'These material powers…call for our attentiveness…' (p. ix). And artist and scholar Lucas Ihlein (2009), in his PhD thesis 'Framing Everyday Experience: Blogging as Art', writes about the importance of attention in his time blogging as an artist-in-residence at his home in Petersham and away in the Western Australian wheatbelt town of Kellerbellin: 'At its core, attention involves a process of discernment, a focusing of the mind's operations, which results in some aspects of the world being included, and some excluded from our consciousness' (p. 71). While I agree that focusing attention on particular aspects of a site can and often does inform the making of a work, I argue that it is often a lack of attention, a lack of focus, coupled with a certain proximity that allows material to speak. And while the nature of blogging may require active selection, many artists talk about their process as 'intuitive', that is, 'without conscious reasoning, instinctive',[9] which implies receptivity rather than intentionality. In her PhD thesis 'On the Process of Creativity: The use of unconscious thought, and rubbish in contemporary visual art practice', artist and scholar

[8] Bennett notes that the idea of vibrant matter has a long philosophical history in the West and that she draws on 'the concepts and claims of Baruch Spinoza, Friedrich Nietzsche, Henry David Thoreau, Charles Darwin, Theodor Adorno, Gilles Deleuze, and the early twentieth-century vitalisms of Bergson and Hans Dreiesch' (p. viii).
[9] Google 'Dictionary'. Definitions from Oxford Languages.

Dell Walker (2019) writes of a painting series: 'the works showed more insight into my underlying concerns than I had in awareness. The image, or series, metaphorically represented issues in my life, yet I was not consciously thinking about these on the day' (p. 3). As when trying to see a faint star, sometimes looking just far enough away, close but not too close, is what allows us to see. I am particularly interested in how the peripheral, what lies outside the immediate focus of our attention, operates with respect to site-responsive practice, and how time plays into this. In 2018, as an artist in residence in Ballina, I used a blowtorch to burn maps of Manus and Nauru and Australia into a grassy block belonging to the house beside it, while every night the glow of surrounding sugarcane fields burning lit up the sky. I didn't consciously decide to use a blowtorch with the burning cane in mind; however, when an ABC journalist asked about the process of making these works, why I had chosen to burn the maps, I remembered the sugarcane and the light ash falling around the residence whenever the wind was coming from the right direction. This work, ~~*Out of sight, out of mind*~~ *In plain sight, 4 Sunway Place, Ballina* 2018, is one of the main creative components of this research and is discussed in detail below (see figure 7).

I became interested in the power of the peripheral after making a small work in 2004. My car often operates as a mobile shed and in 2004 I had been driving around for many months with two things in the back seat – a large (460 x 325 x 140 mm) battered aluminium Sennheiser microphone case someone had given me (minus the microphones), and a large paper bag of assorted rope knots I had collected on a beach in Japan. I had collected the knots with no specific purpose in mind, but the sheer numbers of them scattered along that beach, buried in dunes, recently washed up, and the range of colours and sizes, and the fact that they were distinct knots torn by the typhoons of Japan from ropes of different thicknesses and colours, drew me back to the beach again and again. I was not what you might call 'thinking on them' as they lay in that bag behind the driver's seat, that is, I was not consciously playing with them mentally in order to develop an artwork. Nor was I working with them physically, expecting that physical handling would enable the objects to speak to me, as in the early 20th century 'conceit that blocks had sculptures within them (Bernard's '*nymphe prisonniere'*) which needed bringing out by slow and gentle communion. In a letter of 1911, wood carver Kirchner propounds, "There is a figure in every trunk, one must only peel it out"' (Curtis 1999, p. 85). But, one day, after months of these things resting in the periphery

of my consciousness, not attending to them directly, mentally or physically, I arranged the knots carefully in the protective case, as the microphones had been, each nestling in their laser-cut hole in a new piece of grey foam, tattered sea-worn knots of different configurations (see figure 1).


**Figure 1** Emma Wise, *Untitled,* 2004. Unless otherwise stated, photographs are my own.

Since becoming interested in the power of the peripheral I have also wondered whether *Global Warming* – the salt line I created along the cliffs in 2001 for Sculpture by the Sea Bondi – was influenced by the pleasure I was taking at the time in spotting remnants of the blue marathon line drawn on Sydney roads for the 2000 Sydney Olympics (the influence of the site itself is obvious).

**Figure 2** Top: Emma Wise, *Global Warming,* 2001. Bottom: Sydney Olympics marathon line remnants. Images: RalphTheTheatreCat on Reddit (left), Sydney Daily Photo blog (right).

In addition to thing power and the power of attention and the peripheral, this research examines the influence of what I call an artist's toolbox. In *The Poetics of Space* 1964/2014, Gaston Bachelard argues that 'An entire past comes to dwell in a new house…We bring our *lares* [our home][10] with us…' (p. 27). Following this thinking, an artist working in 'a new house' – which I argue can mean an actual house new to them (especially relevant to this research), or a metaphor for wherever they are that is not home – brings their entire past, their home, with them. Of course, everyone with a memory brings their past with them to varying degrees,[11] but for the purposes of this research, I argue that the 'home' artists bring to a new house is what I call an artist's toolbox – familiar materials and practices artists bring with them that can inform the work they make in response to a site. Artists regularly engaging in the kinds of emergent practices I am discussing here are used to facing the unfamiliar, and bring with them familiar processes of discovery to the newness of the 'house'.

The influence of my own toolbox is clear in the second key creative component of my research, *Border Politics* 2018, for which I created paper barriers across the entry points to the yard of Ignite Studios @ NRCG where I was artist in residence (see figure 6). Paper is the one material I keep in my toolbox, and *Border Politics* was made from two remnant rolls of white paper I bought years ago from a paper bag manufacturer. I have made several works from these rolls including *It's not easy* 2011, for which I played with scale by placing tiny balsa boats on a crumpled paper 'wave' two metres high to make a towering tsunami appear (see figure 3). Faced with this 'new house', I began as I often do, with a familiar practice – the process of discovery – in this case I began by riding around town on a borrowed bicycle, seeing what I could see, talking to people, dwelling (see detailed discussion of *Border Politics* further down in this section).

[10] 'The tutelary deities of a house; hence, the home.' *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* 1973, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
[11] Dell Walker (2019) examines the force of the unconscious in artist practice.

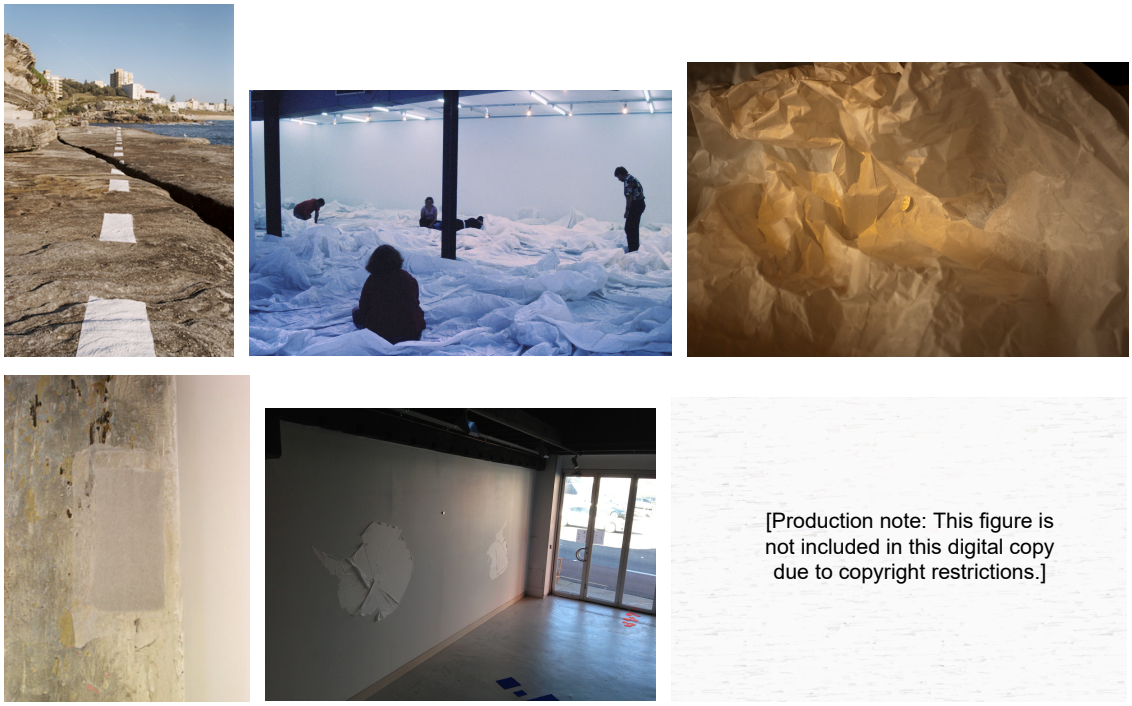


**Figure 3** Clockwise from top left: *Cut to fit*, 2006; *A recollective*, 2006; *It's not easy*, 2011; *Retreat* (detail, Antarctica), 2013 (Image: Alex Wisser); *Retreat* (installation view), 2013; *Repair*, 2013.

Returning to the Heidegger quote at the beginning of this chapter, the second key point he makes is that dwelling is an abiding in a place that 'needs a while'. For the type of dwelling an artist practises when making an artwork in response to a site, they need to take their time. Sometimes an artwork comes 'in a flash' (artist Margaret Roberts, pers. comm., 12 July 2022), other times it can take weeks. Whenever I made an artwork for Sculpture by the Sea Bondi, such as *Global Warming* 2001and *Cut to Fit* 2006 above, I spent many days along the path between Bondi and Bronte. I spent time both paying attention to the particularities of the place and simply being there, sitting down somewhere, allowing the place to speak to me before I had ever heard of Bennett's 'thing power'. I lived in Canberra from 2003 to 2006, which meant during those years I had to come up to Sydney for shorter site visits so there was a greater sense of urgency while I was spending time along the cliffs, and I found more than once it was on the four-hour drive back that an idea would come to me. In the sections below I discuss some of the ways artists dwell in a place through artist residencies or shorter site visits.

*Artist residencies*

Artist residencies are a unique form of dwelling, whereby an artist travels away from home to stay somewhere else and create work (while this presumes the artist has a permanent home, some artists use residencies *as* home, see the discussion on artist duo Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro below).[12] Residencies can offer time slots ranging anywhere from a week to a year and usually provide a combination of accommodation and a working space, although some residencies only offer a place to work.

Some artists bring a specific way of practising that they don't much deviate from and that seems to be unrelated to where they are, treating their residency like a traditional writers' residency, which provides a space free from distraction, often with meals included, for work on a predetermined project that has nothing to do with the space,[13] as in Varuna: The National Writers' House in Katoomba the Blue Mountains:

> Varuna Residential Fellowships offer two to three weeks of full board and accommodation at Varuna including a prepared evening meal, uninterrupted time to write in your own private studio, the companionship of your fellow writers and a one-hour Varuna Conversation with a Varuna consultant…You will need to send us between 7,000 and 10,000 words from the beginning of your manuscript, along with a synopsis of the entire work. For poetry, you need to send us a selection of 10 poems. (https://www.varuna.com.au/fellowships/varuna)

This kind of artist, whose work relies largely on the home they bring with them, uses residencies to continue their studio practice, to create works that have been long in the planning and that require the specialised equipment available at, for example, the glass workshops of Pilchuk Glass School near Seattle in the USA and North Lands Creative at Lybster in Scotland.[14]

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[12] Lucas Ihlein's self-declared residency in his then home suburb of Petersham is unusual and may be unique.

[13] In recent times, there has been an increasing number of writer-in-residence programs that follow similar trajectories to or operate in parallel with artist-in-residence programs, such as the Australian National Library's Creative Arts Fellowships: 'The Library offers Fellowships to support practising writers and artists to develop new work creatively using or inspired by the Library's collections.' (https://www.nla.gov.au/awards-and-grants/creative-fellowships).

[14] https://www.pilchuck.org/ and https://northlandscreative.co.uk/.

Other artists make no work at the time of the residency itself but a lot of work afterwards, perhaps gathering materials while they are there. Although all the work that arises from a residency can be influenced by the time an artist spends at those places, my interest here is in work that is conceived and made during the course of a residency and, more specifically, is located in that physical, habitable space. In other words, I am interested in the kind of dwelling that happens when artists immerse themselves in a particular cultural and geographic space and the artwork that emerges in and from that lived relocation.

From my own experience, an artist's relocation to a Bachelardian 'new house' can turbocharge the impact of the thing power of a site may be enhanced by the artist's relocation to a Bachelardian 'new house'. Emeritus Professor in Psychology at the University of Pittsburgh Bruce Goldstein says that when input to the brain means the mind can easily predict what is going to happen next, functional MRIs show brain activity concentrated in one area,[15] and when the input means what is going to happen next is unpredictable, the brain lights up all over the place in a network of activity,[16] which may account for the burst of creativity I felt during my Ballina residency. As I was dwelling in the place, ideas kept coming to me, only two of which I had time to make during the six weeks of the residency. Foucault (quoted in Barnes c.2013, n. p.) writes of his philosophical journey, 'There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all.' Could the unpredictability of an artist residency, the unfamiliarity of the place, work to light up unexpected connections in our brains that feed into our making?

An examination of the West Melbourne residency program My House Is Too Small is useful here because it is a residency in an occupied domestic space and it was specifically set up to investigate a very similar question. Where most live-in residencies offer artists a place to live and a place to work that is their own for the duration, this residency is an ongoing project run by artist-curator Julia Powles inviting artists to live and work in the West Melbourne apartment she shares with her family:

[15] Functional MRI – functional magnetic resonance imaging.
[16] https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/allinthemind/the-predictive-mind/12740654.

> Framed around the concept of the houseguest, the artists are offered a fold out couch to sleep on and given the keys to the apartment, to use as they will… In a dialogue of trust the artists who undertake the residency will be given permission to access the belongings of the household, possibly reconfiguring the apartment or appropriating the roles of the family members throughout their residency. In this sense the apartment, its furniture, history and inhabitants become the raw materials with which to make art… Utilising chance, awkwardness, and risk My House Is Too Small considers the relationships that are formed and roles played by individuals living within a family unit, as well as questioning concepts of public and private personas and spaces. Central to My House Is Too Small is the concept of the familiar, as the curator posits the simple question: how does an unfamiliar surrounding affect an artist and consequently the art that they develop?[17]

Artists do make work in their own domestic spaces – Kurt Schwitters' famous *Merzbau* c.1920–1937 was an extensive architectural construction assembled over many years in his family home that was 'a seamless interplay between his life and his art' (Gamard 2000, p. 4), and Matisse's *The Swimming Pool* 1952 was a frieze of divers, swimmers and sea creatures created for the dining room of the Hotel Regina where the by then wheelchair-bound artist lived in the south of France –[18] but an invitation to artists to share a home in this way appears to be rare, if not unique. More common is at least some form of separation of art and home, such as Home@735, 'an art gallery located in a terrace house in Sydney's Redfern East' that invited artists to use a few defined spaces in the house as a gallery in order to show people who came to view the work 'how art would fit in their own home'.[19]

Although the My House Is Too Small website refers to the residency project as ongoing, so far it has welcomed just six artists (between August and December 2013), with essays written in response to the residencies, although none by the artists themselves, which means no first-hand accounts of how the surroundings did affect them or their art. The website for the project does not explain why only six artists have come to stay (or were invited), but comparing the work produced in the apartment with the work they produce elsewhere, the artists seem to have brought their home with them

[17] https://www.myhouseistoosmallproject.com/about.
[18] https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2014/matisse/the-swimming-pool.html.
[19] https://homeat735.com.au/.

– their toolbox of familiar materials and practices – perhaps it is impossible to leave it behind entirely. Or, perhaps what is more likely, sharing the apartment with the family was not the unfamiliar experience Powles anticipated. For example, Carolyn Barnes discusses artist-in-residence Simone Slee's work – a series of photographs of household members interacting with a loop of flexible corrugated cardboard.

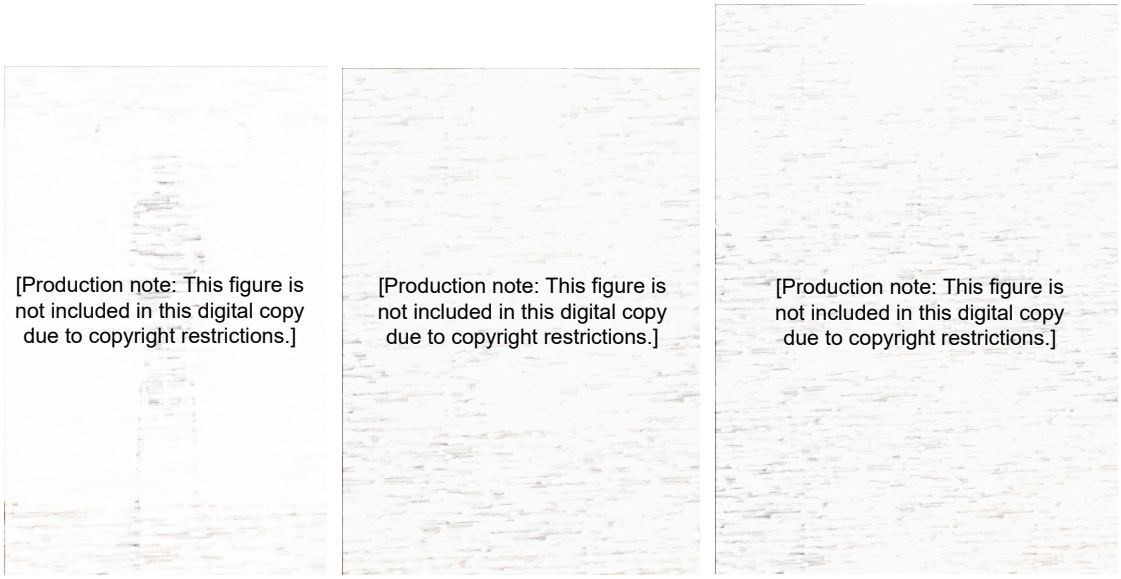


**Figure 4** Left to right: Simone Slee, *Hold up*, 2013. Image: Sarah Scout Presents website; one of the photographs made at My House Is Too Small, December 2013; photographs displayed in the living room at My House Is Too Small, December 2013. Images: My House Is Too Small website.

Barnes (c.2013, n. p.) writes:

> The premise of the series of residencies and exhibitions My House Is Too Small brings art and exhibition practice into relation with a third field of practice, domestic life. The invitation for Slee to intervene in the amalgam of material trappings, social routines and spatial zones that comprise a domestic interior is wholly apposite.

For Barnes, the invitation is apposite because Slee is 'more concerned with the materiality of social life than art critique, her work investigating the embodied performativity in nonhuman material entities; how materials and objects suggest human activity and shape their users', which points to the possibility that Slee's selection undermined the simple proposition at the heart of the project – setting an artist to work

in unfamiliar surrounds. In any case, an online search for work by Slee reveals *Hold up* 2013, a single photograph of Slee up a ladder in a room facing a wall with a loop of cardboard on her head that looks like it might be the same loop of cardboard that the members of Julia Powles' family are photographed with in Slee's My House Is Too Small apartment work in December 2013, photographs that for the open house on 14 and 15 December that year are displayed on a rack in the apartment living room (see figure 4).[20] Two of Slee's videos from a 2017 show – *Rocks happy to help, hold down*, and *Rocks happy to help, hold up, hold down* – show Slee interacting with more cardboard loops while standing on rocks.[21] Slee has an interest in the agency of objects (Miekus 2017, n. p.), what Bennett sees as thing power, and in these photographs and videos investigates the interaction of the cardboard loops and the human body – the apartment work extends the *Hold up* 2013 idea, which is taken further in the 2017 videos, where Slee is videoed upside-down and sideways, the cardboard allowing her body to defy gravity. These cardboard loops are part of the toolbox she brings to this residency, as is her photography practice and the use of performance to investigate the agency of objects. The site provides the actors – the family – and Slee posed them individually with the cardboard loop in front of a white screen. Although the screen separates the family members from the detritus of their everyday lives, Slee photographs wide and the people are firmly located in the middle of their apartment wearing whatever they happened to be wearing that day. And, with the screen removed from its support to reveal more of the apartment, the completed photographs are hung from the support, creating a visual loop of photographs of residents photographed in the apartment photographed for documentation of the project. Through dwelling in this place, Slee has taken on the abode, as Heiddegger would say, and when the abode is asked to take on the work, the loop is complete.

A similar process occurred with another My House Is Too Small artist-in-residence, Matthew Berka, who also worked with visual loops. He created silent video loops of the apartment with the inhabitants going about their business, and then projected the loops onto the white wall under the kitchen bench as the inhabitants go about their business (figure 5).[22]

[20] https://www.myhouseistoosmallproject.com/december.
[21] https://www.sarahscoutpresents.com/exhibitions/15-simone-slee-rocks-and-things-happy-to-help/.
[22] See video documentation of the work in situ at https://vimeo.com/73121948.

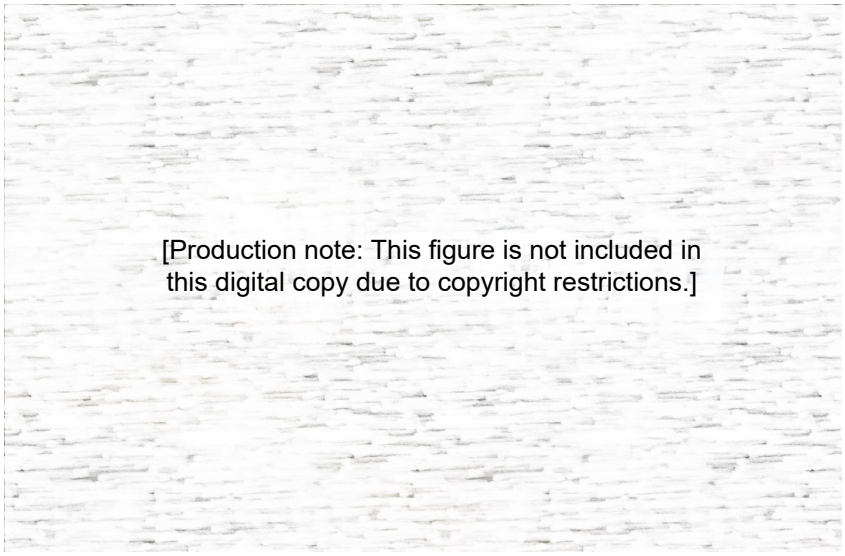


**Figure 5** Matthew Berka, *17:18 Diagonal Repeats,* 2013. Image: My House Is Too Small website.

This simple work is not shown on Berka's website, perhaps because it was made for and belongs in that apartment. Certainly it is unlike any of the other more complex video work he shows, which uses found footage, created and historical images, cuts to black, and diegetic and non-diegetic sound. So if Powles' expectation was that an artist would make work differently in unfamiliar surroundings, it seems the project may have been successful after all. Berka brings his home with him in that he uses a familiar toolbox practice – video – but comes up with an altogether different outcome that originates from and is deeply connected to the materiality of the living space and its inhabitants. It reminds me of the quiet video work I saw in Calthorpes' House – of the house itself filmed from across the road as dusk falls. As Berka squeezes into the apartment with the family, he squeezes his work into the space under the bench, framed by the busyness of the kitchen space beyond. The familiar loop that is family life continuing around and doubled by the loop he has created and displayed under the bench.

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As mentioned earlier in this chapter, I undertook a residency in Ballina in 2018 at Ignite Studios @ NRCG. The two works I produced there are two of the works that form the creative practice component of this research – *Border Politics* (2018) and ~~*Out of sight, out of mind*~~*, In plain sight (4 Sunway Place, Ballina)* (2018). The Ignite

application asked artists to nominate a residency period between two weeks and four months. I chose six weeks, thinking it would be long enough to conceive and create a substantial work, but it turned out to be too short to make all the works I came up with during my time there. I did not know Ballina and had applied with a proposal that referenced a work I had made previously that involved mapping housing stories. I had brought a huge roll of canvas for this purpose but after dwelling in the place for a week, criss-crossing the town on a borrowed bicycle, I put the idea to one side. Slowly riding around on a bike gave me a sense of connection to the place that would not have been possible had I been cruising about the place in my car, which may have looked suspicious. As Heidegger writes, dwelling needs a while, and I found myself taking my time.

Soon after arriving I discovered that the town of Ballina had become an island in 1896 when a canal was cut through from North Creek to the Richmond River, and the more I rode my bike around the place, finding water at the frayed ends of suburban roads, the more like an island it felt. Most days I would stop in at the op shops a short ride or walk from the studio with an eye out for what this new residency needed – I was only the second resident and, in their haste to open, the kitchen/living room/bedroom was bare of all but a bed and a set of bowls, plates, mugs and cutlery. There was a steady stream of items I remembered from my grandmother's kitchen flowing into and out of these op shops and I imagined they came from the kitchens of farmhouses in the hinterland around Ballina, or perhaps the original suburbs, as the old women died. Also, in my first weeks in Ballina the cave rescue of the Thai soccer boys was taking place, and people around the world and in Australia, including me, were following the story closely. There seemed to be a stark contrast between the island of Ballina, where I could happily go about making home in the residency, and the unhappy islands of Manus, Nauru and Christmas Island; and between the attention paid to the rescue of the Thai boys and the attention paid to the people seeking asylum in Australia who had been going quietly mad in offshore detention for years, relegated to the periphery of many Australian minds.

While I was thinking about border protection and this difference in attention, I was seeing people, mostly council workers, passing by the windows of the studio residence as they took a shortcut through the Ignite Studios yard to or from where they had parked

their car, or to get a coffee at the gallery café next door to Ignite. The enormous old-fashioned wooden sash windows of the residence were without curtains and I was sprung changing clothes more than once before I papered the lower half of the glass for a bit of privacy. This practical solution to achieving my own desire for privacy (using the paper rolls I had brought with me – the only physical material I keep in my toolbox) mixed with the ongoing debate in Australia about asylum seekers triggered my first work in the place. I decided to block this stream of shortcutters to see how people reacted to being denied the right of passage they had come to expect. I defended Ignite's borders for a week by fixing paper barriers across the gates and wrapping the latches up with paper, preventative paperwork of a different order to the kind faced by asylum seekers. The barriers were fragile – it was white paper bag paper – and could be overcome without much effort because I wanted people to be able to make a choice. Most people went around but some broke through.

**Figure 6** Emma Wise, *Border Politics* 2018, Ignite Studios artist residency, Ballina, NSW. Clockwise from top: someone looks at a barrier and walks on, someone walks around, someone has broken through.

After a week, I removed the barriers and talked to the shortcutters about their experience of the paperwork, how they felt about being denied access to their shortcut, and about Australia's border policies. In general, people were happy to stop and chat about their experiences of the project, reporting reactions ranging from mild irritation to curiosity. No-one made an unprompted connection between the work and what was happening at Australia's borders. The only people I identified as actually breaking through the paper barriers (one barefoot man who worked at a nearby op shop hopped over regularly rather than breaking through the paper) were the two members of the council's IT department. The head of IT didn't want to talk to me about the experience but his young worker said he too had been hopping over until he lost a tiny bit of his vape in a pile of leaves near the fence, after which he broke through.

*Border Politics* illustrates how, as Bachelard would say, I brought my home with me: the desire for what I was used to in the place where I live – privacy – and, from my toolbox, not only a familiar material but my tendency to engage with socio-political issues. For example, *Global Warming* 2001, a salt line several metres above the rock platform between Bondi and Bronte, warned of rising sea levels (see figure 2), and *Cut to fit* 2006, a dashed line cutting off three sections of cliff along the Bondi to Bronte cliff walk (see figure 3), was made in response to the Coalition government's excision of parts of northern Australia from Australia's migration zone in 2001 and a failed attempt to excise the entire of mainland Australia in 2006 (subsequently achieved by a Labor government in 2013). The work resulted from time spent dwelling, as Heidegger suggests, and was influenced by the thing power of that particular physical place – a house with a very porous boundary (5 different gates and a low fence) in the broader context of an island.

My mind was now dwelling on our treatment of asylum seekers, and as I was riding around Ballina I noticed an unusual amount of weedy vacant blocks near the centre of town. I spent some time trying to contact the various owners in order to get permission to brushcut the weeds in these neglected blocks into the shapes of Australia's neglected offshore islands of detention. The idea was to bring Australia's detention regime to the attention of people in Ballina through the sheer proximity of the work.

US social justice activist Bryan Stevenson calls for proximity as a key element in social change, 'the first thing we've got to do if we want to change the world is choose to be proximate to the things that matter... proximity gives you insight, it gives you

knowledge, it gives you understanding', citing his own experience as a young African-American child in the mid 1960s when he was attending a racially segregated primary school and a group of lawyers came to town and forced the school district to abide by the Supreme Court ruling that required racially integrated education. 'Because these lawyers chose to get proximate, I got to go to high school... and from high school got to college' (Stevenson 2015, n. p.). I see Stevenson's 'proximity' as a version of Heidegger's 'dwelling', which as mentioned previously is an abiding in a place that 'takes a while'. Stevenson says that proximity (or dwelling in a place) gives you insight, knowledge and understanding, that is, as Heidegger writes, 'dwelling [proximity] takes on an abode' (p. 20).

After receiving knockbacks for the weedy blocks I had identified and with the end of my residency no longer seeming quite so far away, I contacted the local refugee advocacy group, Ballina Region 4 Refugees (BR4R), for help. They were very enthusiastic about the idea but after much scouting around, the only available block we could come up with was a member's own well-tended grassy yard, no weeds in sight. For the purposes of proximity, however, the house was well located in a suburban street in the centre of Ballina island. With the idea of neglected weedy 'maps' of Manus and Nauru still front of mind, I told her I would have to mull it over and asked her if it would be okay if I came over every so often to walk about the yard, or sit in the shade of the eaves of her house for a while, in other words, to dwell on the place. I had by this time discovered the Ballina Naval and Maritime Museum, staffed by volunteers. Every bit of space inside this innocuous looking single-storey yellow brick building is taken up with an astonishing collection of models of anything of a seagoing nature and anything to do with the sea, including a giant balsa raft that had been towed into Ballina after travelling from Ecuador in 1973. As I negotiated with the volunteers about the possibility of adding a model I proposed to make of one of Tony Abbott's orange refugee tow-back lifeboats to the collection, the sugar cane farmers of the area were beginning to fire their crops, lighting up the horizon at night, with the ash floating gently down around the residency if the wind was blowing in the right direction. It only occurred to me later, as I was being interviewed about the project by an ABC journalist, that there might be a link between the cane fires and my decision to burn maps of Manus and Nauru into the grassy yard of the BR4R member. After a test burn, the member was on board. Another member lent me a blowtorch. I gridded the yard and

then mapped out the islands with the help one afternoon of local volunteers using the small gridded paper maps I had constructed. Enthusiastic and proximate though they were, accurate they were not, and I spent the next three days carefully correcting the outlines before beginning the burn. Four weeks later my residency was over and Manus and Nauru were more than neglected, they were scorched earth (see figure 7).

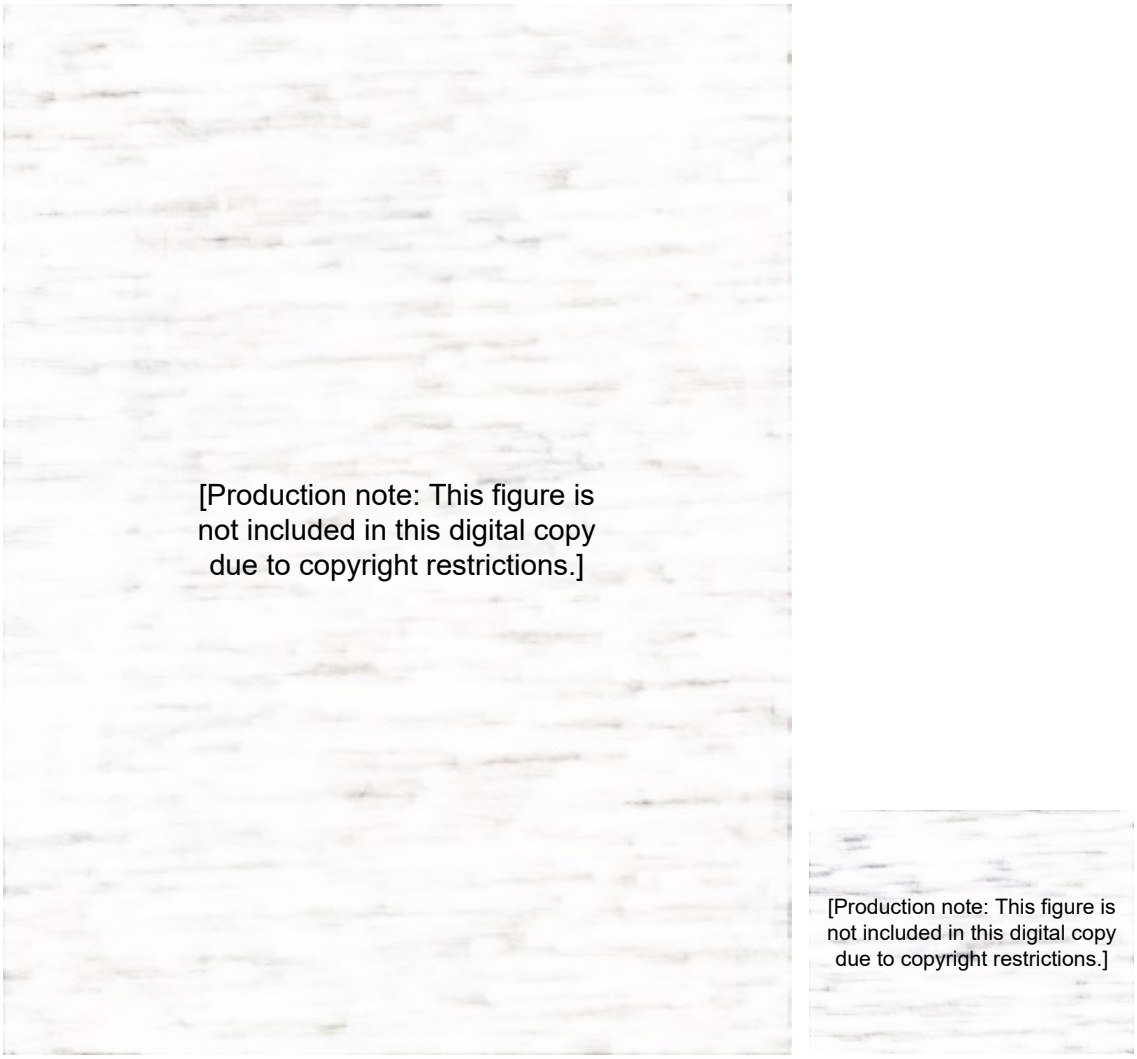


**Figure 7** ~~*Out of sight, out of mind*~~ *In plain sight (4 Sunway Place, Ballina)* 2018, installation view (left), burning Manus (right). Images: Paul Daley (left), anonymous (right).

The week that I finished the project, the successful Kids Off Nauru campaign initiated by World Vision Australia was launched and the Ballina Region 4 Refugees group used my work to promote the campaign with some temporary additions (cut-out paper dolls), which can be seen in the ABC story on the project.[23] I had suggested to BR4R that their links to local schools might enable them to organise a drone photo opportunity with 120

[23] https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-09-03/artist-burns-ground-for-refugees/10191298.

local children standing on the map of Nauru looking up, representing the children still on the island, but after a few attempts they went with paper dolls instead. The impact of the work was enhanced by the media coverage – on the ABC and in the local paper (figure 8). Paul Daley, the drone operator, was so taken by the work that he incorporated it into a short film highlighting what we are doing to refugees.

'Bringing them into plain sight'

ARTIST Emma Wise has spent the past three weeks blowtorching giant maps of Manus and Nauru islands into the grass of a vacant block at 4 Sunway Pl in Ballina to create a striking outdoor artwork called *Out of sight, Out of Mind In Plain Sight*.

The artwork aims to bring the plight of asylum seekers into public discourse.

"Our governments have spent $4.99 billion so far on offshore detention, keeping over 3000 men, women and children in hopeless conditions on these remote islands – out of our sight and out of our minds," she said.

"I have been working with local community group Ballina Region for Refugees to develop artworks that bring the people on these islands seeking refuge in our country into plain sight."

Ms Wise often works alone on her large scale works but this time had help from the community.

Members of Ballina Region for Refugees, local teachers' professional development group Raiders of the Lost Art, neighbours and those from further afield all helped upscale the islands onto the gridded block, a process that had everyone stretching their mathematical and geographical skills to the limit. People were pleased to be able to do something that expressed their support for refugees.

"Most people I talk to feel uneasy about what we are doing to these people, particularly the children. If we stop to think about it, we know that people desperate enough to leave their home and everything familiar, and brave enough to make the perilous journey here, both need and deserve our protection," Ms Wise said.

She said that the best way to experience the artwork is to come to block at 4 Sunway Pl and walk around it.

The block is open to visitors daily.





IN PLAIN SIGHT: Emma Wise's latest exhibition on show at 4 Sunway Place, Ballina. PHOTO: EMMA WISE

"If we stop to think about it, we know that people desperate enough to leave their home and everything familiar, and brave enough to make the perilous journey here, both need and deserve our protection"
— Emma Wise

continued from page 10

Notice of Development Consents Issued (cont'd)

**Figure 8** Article on the project in the *Ballina Shire Advocate*, 29 August 2018.

This kind of work has been described as 'art as action', where 'distinctions between art, action and activism become increasingly intermingled and complex' (Lynn & Papastergiadis 2014). Claire Bishop, in her comprehensive text *Artificial Hells* (2012) begins her discussion of participatory art and the 'social turn' that has taken place since the 1990s with a quote from artist Dan Graham: 'All artists are alike. They dream of doing something that's more social, more collaborative, and more real than art.' (p. 1). Bishop doesn't contextualise or reference the quote, so it is hard to know what Graham was critiquing, and whether he was intending all that is implied in this comment – that art (a certain kind of art?) is less than real, not very social, not very collaborative. Does Graham mean that the artists he implicates are dreaming of doing something social,

collaborative and real that is quite separate from art making? Or does he mean they dream of a kind of artmaking that combines these qualities, such as the artmaking imagined and practised by artist Lyndal Jones through The Avoca Project, subtitled ‘art for a world facing ecological catastrophe’?

The Avoca Project was based around a house in Avoca in rural Victoria and ran for 14 years from 2005, hosting hundreds of artists and visitors during that time. While that project wound up in 2019, the house now operates as The Swiss House, ‘a continuing experiment in art-as-action’. The Avoca Project website (n. d.) describes Jones’ process and proposition:

> In this extended art-project she works with the house, the local community, national and international artists and scholars and climate change activists to address the place, the land, the house itself, together with the humans who inhabit it all, as a site of climate change and response.
> Her proposition – that, as the house and the grounds are transformed into a site that thrives despite a heating climate, so too will all those involved in it change thereby creating a new ecological order.

The rehabilitation of the house and the land, and the occupation of the site by artists and others, was and is a dwelling or being in residence directed largely towards engagement with the climate crisis the world is facing. Site, materials and artist practice were intimately combined to address this issue. ‘Just as nature can no longer be understood as a pristine and discrete realm apart from human activity, art’s autonomy is all the more untenable when faced with ecological catastrophe.’ (Demos quoted in The Avoca Project n.d.). For Jones, the house operates as a focal point where ‘the line between lived-activity and formal art presentation has been completely blurred’ (Avoca Project n. d.). Bywaters (2012) says the house at Avoca, which is at the core of the project, ‘is not an extension of her home, or a weekend holiday destination, but a work in progress’ (p. 70) that has been ‘made into an immersive public artwork that provides local residents and invited participants an opportunity to question, discuss and consider the house as a sustainable environment’ (p. 67). For example, *Rehearsing Catastrophe: The Ark in Avoca* (2010), performed during an 8-year drought in Avoca, was inspired by the idea of the house as an ark and involved 120 locals and other volunteers processing across the river flats dressed in animal costumes and being invited onto the ‘ark’,

created by projections onto the house and out through the windows and soundscapes incorporating crashing thunder.

The next several pages discuss two further art-as-action projects that are not residencies but that are relevant to the art of dwelling and making with the material of lived-in places in that both were created over long periods of time in collaboration with tenants in public housing buildings under threat. In 2017, Clare Lewis worked with the people of the high-rise Turanga and Matavai buildings in the threatened housing estate of Waterloo-Redfern in Sydney to create *We Live Here* (figure 9), lighting the windows of many apartments in the two buildings with coloured LED strips. Unlike The Avoca Project, where the house operated as a focus for ways of working and living that address the climate crisis, *We Live Here* was a direct reaction to the NSW government's announced intention to demolish these particular buildings amid their ongoing sale of public housing. 'This is about making Waterloo visible to wider Sydney, [and] letting people know something major is going to be happening here very soon' (Lewis quoted in Walker & Mitchell n. p.). Lewis also made a documentary about the project, *There Goes our Neighbourhood*, which aired on the national broadcaster in November 2018.[24]

**Figure 9** Clare Lewis and residents of the Turanga and Matavai buildings, *We Live Here*, 2017.

[24] https://clarelewis.org/production/there-goes-our-neighbourhood/ This work follows the ongoing work of Squatspace's Tours of Beauty 2005–2009, 2016, 2019/20 which draw attention to the history and spatial politics of the Redfern-Waterloo area https://squatspace.com/; and the You Are Here collective (Keg de Souza and Zanny Begg)'s There Goes the Neighbourhood project 2009, an enormous 'exhibition, residency, discussion and publishing project' exploring the politics of urban space with a focus on the disruptive effects of gentrification on local communities http://www.theregoestheneighbourhood.org/book.htm.

I was living in Eastlakes, Sydney in 2017 and was surprised by this magical work when riding home from the city on my bicycle one night – the buildings actually twinkled. Many of the light strips were blinking on and off rather than shining steadily, transforming the towers for the outside spectator from brutalist reminders of our neglect of the poorest in our society to sites of beauty and hope. As I watched the buildings there in the dark that night, and many nights after that, I imagined each of the people involved and their decision to join the work. The lights were a sign to the outside world of the community living in these buildings.

Lewis, who had been living nearby these towers for a while – a reminder of US social justice activist Bryan Stevenson's emphasis on the importance of proximity for social change – told journalist Steph Harmon (2017) that she had first thought to light the buildings as a kind of public art installation but when she found out about the impending demolition, it became about activism 'a statement of habitation, and of presence'. For Lewis, it was important to make sure the people in the buildings felt a sense of ownership of the project and she spent a year connecting with them before the project's official opening: 'We were well aware from the beginning that every single light installation is a conversation and the start of a miniature relationship.' This kind of collaborative artmaking is the kind of dwelling that 'takes on an abode', as Heidegger says, and 'takes a while' – the work is contingent upon or could even be seen as the relationships built between artist and resident. *We Live Here* was originally intended to last for two months – it was supported by the City of Sydney's Art & About ('Art in unusual places: reshaping and rethinking city spaces')[25] – but many participants decided to keep their lights on. At time of writing, five years on, there are still a few lit windows in evidence high above the metro station being built to service the planned new precinct.

This is not the first time a creative project has emerged from these buildings. The company Big hART, well known for its work with vulnerable communities throughout Australia, and known for its commitment to long-term engagements, worked between 2002 and 2006 on the Northcott Narratives project, that led to the creation of photographic, film, music, oral history and performance and storytelling projects. Over three and a half years they worked 'to engage tenants, strengthen their creative dispositions, and build relationships between tenants and a range of different

[25] https://www.artandabout.com.au/about/.

communities' (Wright & Palmer 2009, n. p.). While this is an extraordinarily dedicated example of a kind of creative dwelling, as a community cultural development project it lies beyond the scope of this research.

Across town in Sydney's The Rocks, Myra Demetriou, 89 years old and the last remaining public housing tenant of the Sirius building, was facing a similar fight. In mid 2014, the NSW government had notified all residents that the building would be demolished and they would be moved to other homes away from the community many of them had lived in all their lives. In November 2014, Demetriou put up flashing LED lights in her apartment window spelling out SOS, the international distress signal as well as an acronym for Save Our Sirius (figure 10). In 2017, the building was lit for the city's Vivid Festival as part of the residents' Save Our Sirius campaign (figure 11). The campaign was supported by well-connected architects who helped save the building but failed to save the community. Myra Demetriou was moved in January 2018 and died in 2021; the building is now being redeveloped as luxury housing. Although these Sirius works are not strictly within the scope of this research – was either work made by contemporary artists? – they are site responsive and, as with *We Live Here*, the intention is to make the plight of the residents visible to wider Sydney, to demand proximity.

**Figure 10** Sirius building SOS in the window of Myra Demetriou's flat, 2017.

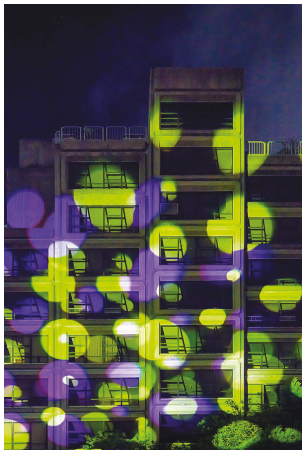

**Figure 11** Sirius building lit for the Vivid Festival, 2017. Image: Ben Guthrie, Wikimedia Commons.

Returning now to artist residencies, this section focuses on artist duo Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro. Before having children and finally buying a house in the Blue Mountains behind Sydney, Healy and Cordeiro spent long periods of time living in residencies around the world, staying with friends and family when they were back in Sydney. After making their mark in the local art world with *The Cordial Home Project* 2003 – a house they demolished and stacked at Artspace in Woolloomooloo (see chapter 3) – they continued stacking and/or arranging things in residencies in Germany and Japan in 2004, 2005 and 2006. Bringing their toolbox with them – in this case a familiar practice – they applied themselves to the particular materialities of the spaces. Miwon Kwon (2002), who writes that we need to understand 'seeming oppositions as *sustaining* relations' suggests the future of site-specific art might lie in 'finding a terrain between mobilization and specificity' (p. 166), which over several years it seems the artists did.

Arriving at a residency in a warehouse in Weil am Rhein, Germany, in 2004, they found the space filled with detritus from previous occupants and decided to bundle the contents into a ball for their installation *Deceased Estate* 2004 (figure 12) 'a monument both to waste and to the precarious and ambiguous social status of artists, marginalised from yet necessarily part of the dominant culture' (Storer, 2005, p. 6). Unlike the careful stack of *The Cordial Home Project*, this unruly gathering together of all the detritus they had been living amongst at the time reflects the carelessness with which previous artists had dwelled in the space. Storer goes on to quote Cordeiro who says the work is 'a testament to the paradoxically high standard of living artists enjoy in the west and their chronic lack of housing stability'.

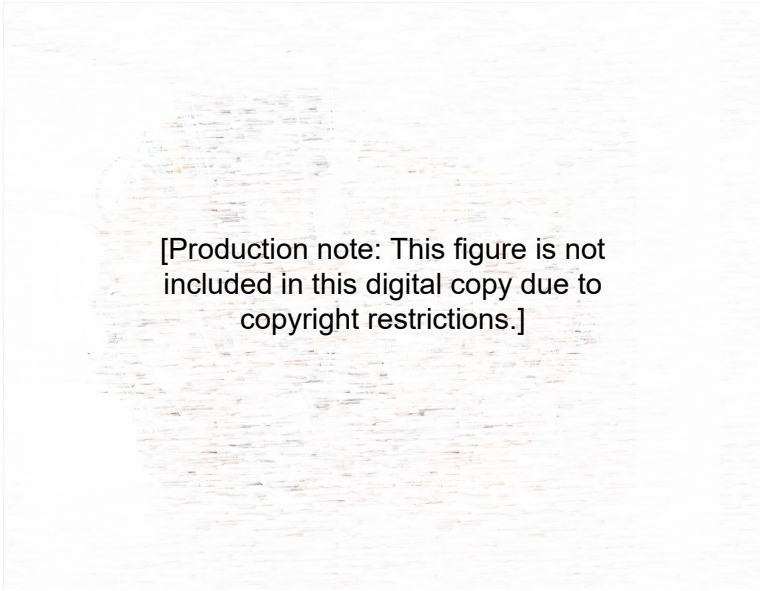


**Figure 12** Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro, *Deceased Estate,* 2004. Lambda print. Collection of Newcastle Art Gallery. Image: © the artists, photographer: Christian Schnur.

This work brings to mind Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen's *Houseball* (1985, 1993), which was 'based on the idea that one could gather all one's possessions in a large cloth and tie them up in the form of a ball that would roll – thereby making any other transportation unnecessary – to its next destination. The house was left behind; its contents became a house in itself.' The original 1985 *Houseball* was an actual collection of all van Bruggen's household objects. (Oldenburg & van Bruggen n. d.)

In 2005 at Takadanobaba – the Australia Council for the Arts' Tokyo artist residency for twenty years – Cordeiro and Healy created another artwork from the material of the residence itself (figure 13), taking everything in the residence, their own stuff and whatever was there when they arrived, and stacking it neatly against the wall. Scholar Kate Sands (2019, p. 139) says, 'The work aligns with the principle of economy, both of space and of décor, that is a feature of traditional Japanese culture and also a result of urban congestion.' It is not clear whether they made the work after paying particular attention to the compact nature of their immediate surroundings or whether the power of the peripheral took hold of their practice as they experienced living in a city where space is at a premium and ritual is part of everyday life. However, it seems almost inevitable that, living and working in this tiny space and dwelling for a long period of time in such an ordered culture, the artists would draw on their familiar practice of stacking to make exactly this work.

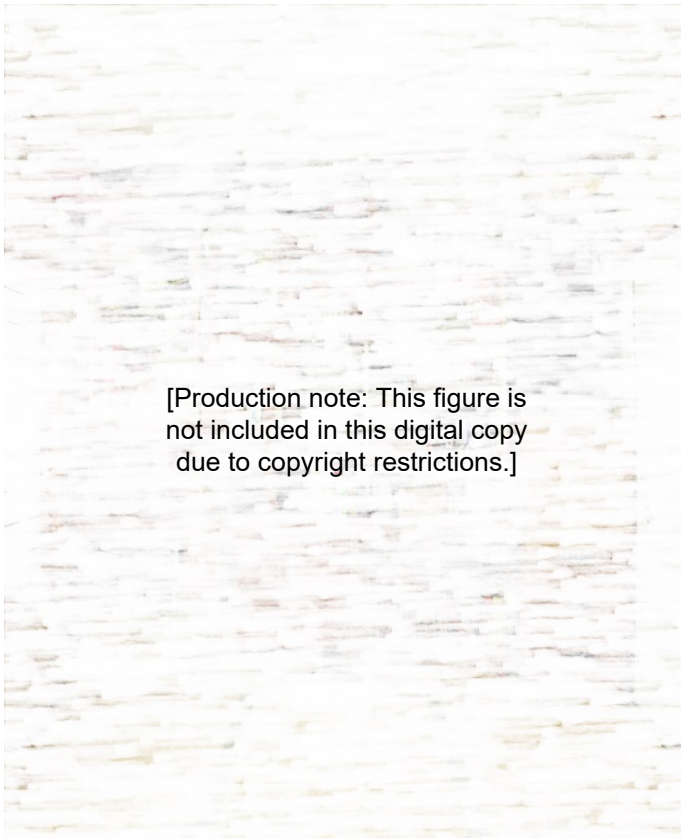


**Figure 13** Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro, *Installation***,** 2005, entire found objects within artist residency in Tokyo. Image: https://www.claireandsean.com/works_Frameset.html.

The following year, they again stacked the entire contents of another Australia Council residency, this time in Berlin (figure 14). Here the relationship between material and site is not quite as clear as in the other two residency works. By this time their practice has shifted, the work is more a gathering than a stacking, but they have stuck to the principle of using the entire found contents of the studios in making all three of the works. They collected the material, constructed and then documented the installations in those spaces, the documentation photographs becoming works in themselves. In the case of *Deceased Estate*, which began as their response to the filthy state they found the Weil am Rhein residency warehouse in, they addressed the traditional requirement to make good a space after exhibition, by leaving the wrapped detritus in situ.

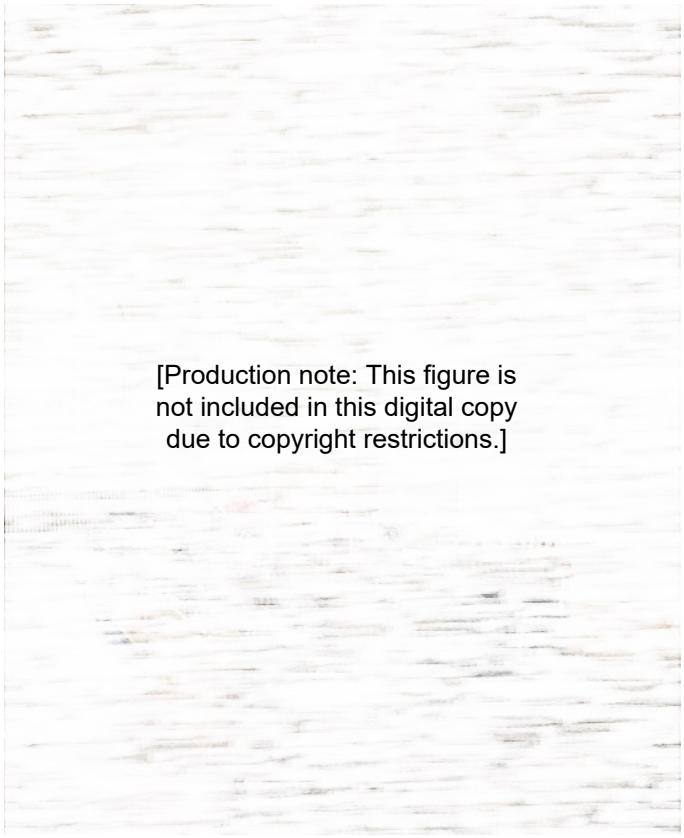


**Figure 14** Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro, *Installation/Hoard***,** 2006, entire studio contents, Künstlerhaus Bethanien. Image: https://www.claireandsean.com/works_Frameset.html.

*Short notice*

Although being an artist-in-residence gives an artist time to make a work in response to a place, many artists make site-responsive works after a short site visit, which could be just an hour or two, or could entail repeated visits over a number of days or weeks. This section discusses the work of Hannah Bertram. Bertram, like Healy and Cordeiro, brings her toolbox to her dwelling, but she has refined her practice to working with dust alone, creating decorative dust patterns in galleries and residencies nationally and internationally.[26] She never strays far from this familiar practice of using the dust to pattern a surface to create, for example, a trompe l'oeil carpet or tablecloth.

In 2010, Bertram made *The Silence of Becoming and Disappearing*, ephemeral 'site-sensitive' dust works created in ten private homes. She developed each of the works in

[26] http://www.hannahbertram.com/.

consultation with the residents, and they also chose how long the work would last and who they would invite to see it. The place determined the type of dust she used: marble dust was used on a marble floor, bushfire ash was used in a house in the Grampians, and cigarette ash was used on a French polished table (figure 15). The works were created on tables and under furniture, on floors inside and porches outside. One work on a porch lasted just a few hours under the feet of 200 people invited for a cocktail party. The most private of the works was created in two drawers with only one viewer who hoped it would last forever (figure 16).[27]

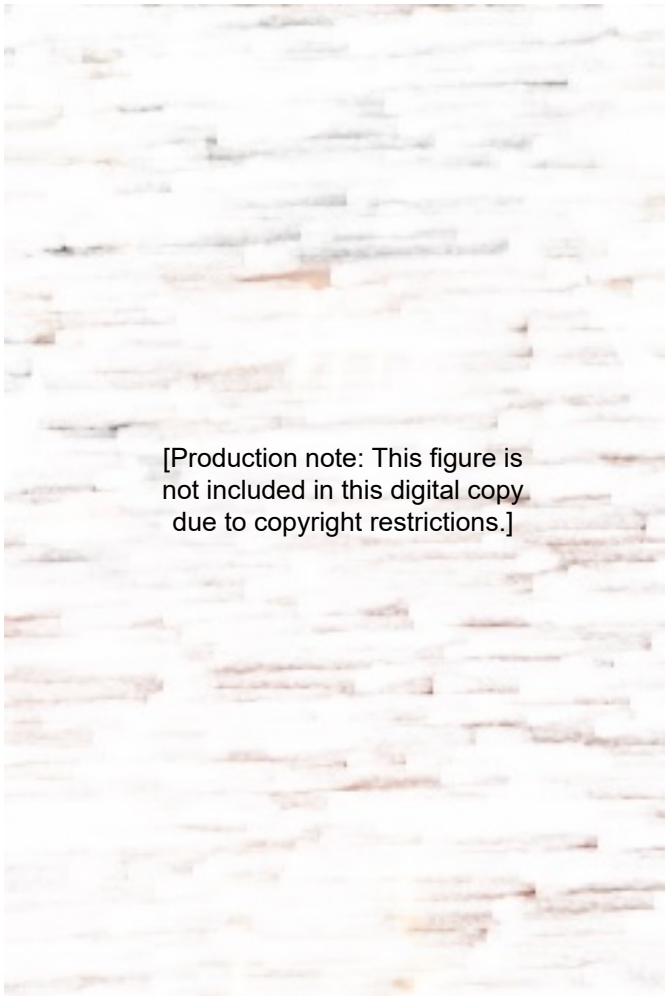


**Figure 15** Hannah Bertram working with cigarette ash on a French-polished table in a private home for *The Silence of Becoming and Disappearing* (2010).
Image: http://www.hannahbertram.com/.

[27] http://www.hannahbertram.com/index - /silence-test

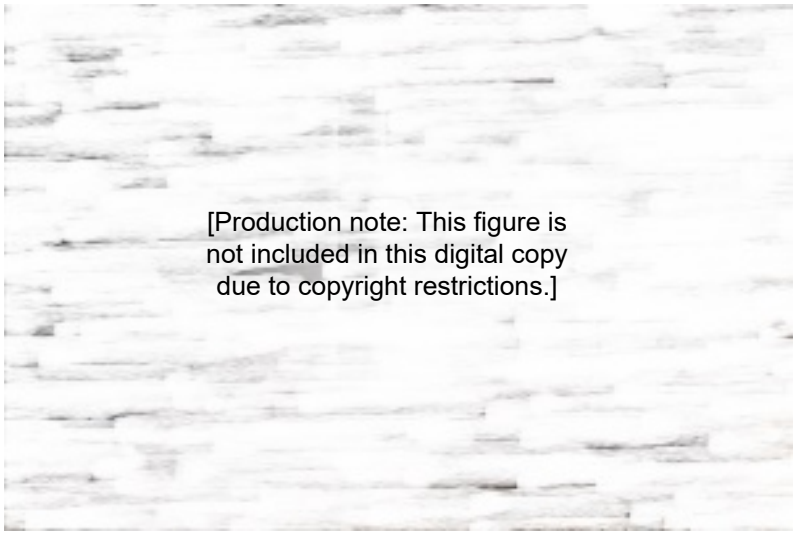


**Figure 16** Hannah Bertram, *The Silence of Becoming and Disappearing* (two drawers), 2010. Image: http://www.hannahbertram.com/.

She began this practice by transforming dust into an ornamental carpet – *An Ordinary Kind of Ornament* (2007) – in artist-run-initiative West Space in Melbourne, and this became an ongoing series, but the closest these 'carpets' have come to people's living spaces is a commission for the foyer of the Gershwin Hotel (now The Evelyn) in New York in 2008, which was roped off with velvet bollards. Carpets belong to floors and in this obvious respect Bertram's works are as she describes them, site-sensitive, and especially so when the patterns have been made from material collected on site. The patterns themselves are harder to locate, with repetitions of motifs across sites and no obvious historical links between the patterns and the places where her carpets appear. The overall effect is of what is often referred to in the West as an Oriental carpet or Persian rug – densely patterned with a border and fringed at either end – but examine the patterns and motifs more closely and that link becomes weaker. One consistent theme, beyond the fragility of the works themselves, is the disintegration of the pattern, as motifs spill out from a carpet's rectangular shape. The use of this technique on the crumbling floor of an old prison cell in Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site in Philadelphia is particularly effective in terms of the relationship between the site and the work (figure 17). The carpet and floor are both in a state of disintegration, and the flocks of birds flying away convey a sense of freedom, perhaps reflecting the dreams of those once incarcerated here.[28]

[28] http://www.hannahbertram.com/index#/dust.

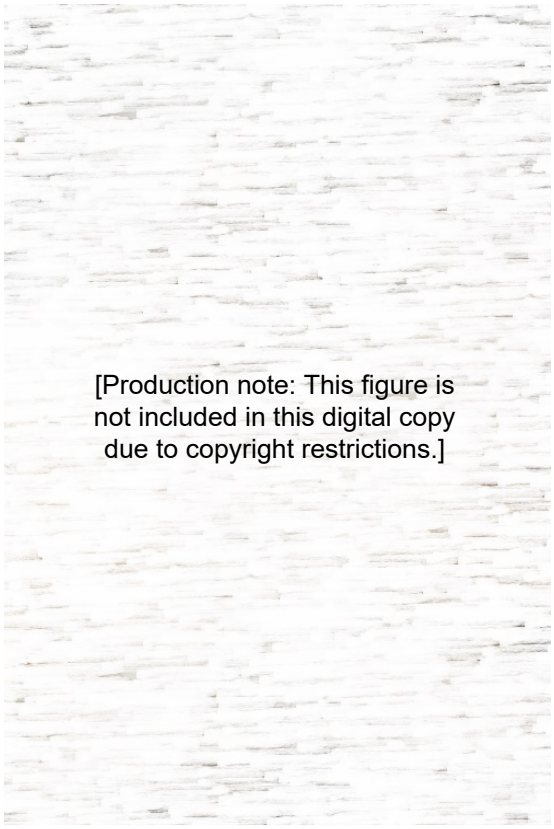


**Figure 17** Hannah Bertram, *An Ordinary Kind of Ornament* (Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, Philadelphia), 2014, dust collected from prison cell. Image: Hannah Bertram, *The Silence of Becoming and Disappearing* (two drawers), 2010. Image: http://www.hannahbertram.com/.

My only experience of Bertram's dust works is through documentation. I first saw one (a finished version of the work in figure 15) on a postcard produced by Dianne Tanzer Gallery, Melbourne for an iteration of *The Silence of Becoming and Disappearing* (2010) and had to flip the postcard over for information and even then I could not really see what I was looking at. This series is the only time Bertram has worked in private houses and for the works in the homes she did not employ her more recent pattern disintegration techniques. In many of these houses the works were made to seamlessly integrate with existing features (figures 18 & 19).


**Figure 18** Hannah Bertram, *The Silence of Becoming and Disappearing* (marble porch), 2010. Image: http://www.hannahbertram.com/.

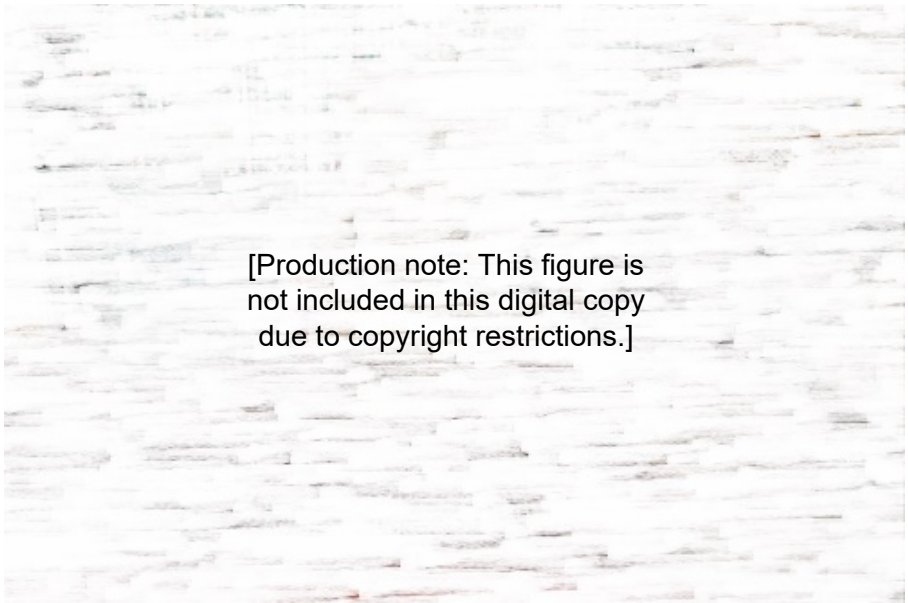


**Figure 19** Hannah Bertram, *The Silence of Becoming and Disappearing* (coffee table), 2010. Image: http://www.hannahbertram.com/.

As with the video work in Calthorpes' House, you could walk right past these works and not know they were there. Bertram's website includes these documentation photographs of this series but because the photographs are of the completed works alone they do not reveal the connection the residents have with the works or how the works were experienced by the people the residents invited to see them.

***

This section focuses on site visits for artworks that could be described as performative, and includes a discussion of several works I created for Damien Minton's Redfern Biennale. The late twentieth century and early twenty-first have seen increasing slippage between the visual and performing arts; and performative work occupies a house quite differently from work without bodies, particularly where performance is unexpected. The Modern Art Projects Art and Architecture series based mostly in the villages of the Blue Mountains behind Sydney involved recruiting the owners of mid-century houses to volunteer their homes for one-day-only open houses during which artists would exhibit work in and around the house and people would come to look in small groups (many visitors were architects taking advantage of the opportunity to examine private mid-century houses). The most memorable work at the Morton House 'Eco Spirit' exhibition (1–5pm, 6 April 2014) was *Incursion – Damp*, the performance of the green creature (see figure 20) in the house's central courtyard (shown from above in figure 21).

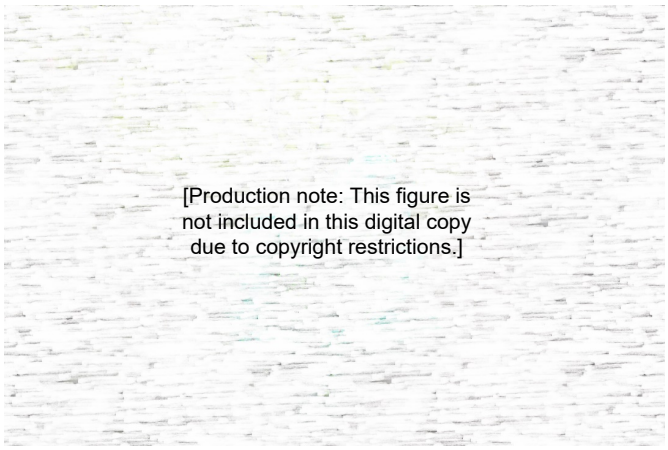


**Figure 20** John A Douglas, *Incursion – Damp*, 6 April 2014, Morton House, Woodford, NSW. Image: John A Douglas website.


**Figure 21** Morton House (also known as Cave House), Woodford, NSW. Image: Billy Gruner.

Unlike much of the work in the exhibition, including paintings and ceramic works produced elsewhere and placed in situ for the day, this work appeared to have been created in response to the site. The house contains an internal courtyard, which operated like a cage of sorts, a kind of external home for the creature. The vegetation in the courtyard meant the creature/performer was not immediately apparent despite its vivid green suit, and it was movement that caught my attention when it first slid up to the glass window close to me as I walked through the house: 'Inhabiting the delicate, enclosed eco-system of the vitrine, Douglas lurked in the foliage as an invasive green life-form, insinuating himself around the damp surfaces.'[29]

The artists were only given access to the place on the morning of the open house, although they were sometimes sent photographs. This truncation of the time the artists could spend dwelling in the place is possibly what led many of the artists to rely on their familiar toolbox of materials and practices, although Gruner says that the artists were selected because 'we knew that they could deliver the goods under that extreme commando-style day' (Billy Gruner, pers. comm., November 2021). However, in performance works the performance itself can become the artists' dwelling time, allowing them to take on an abode as the day progresses, with visitors to the performance operating as a material part of the site, influencing the development of the

[29] http://www.johnadouglas.com.au/project/incursion/.

performance. Wherever such a performance occurs, whether it be in an artist's own home, as in British artist Bobby Baker's *Kitchen Show*, mentioned previously, or the home of a stranger, an artist experienced in such events can draw on familiar practices from their toolbox in their interactions with the unfamiliar that the visitors present.

Another Blue Mountains performative project in occupied homes, again involving minimal site visits, is *Sound Bites* (2012), now an ongoing event series called *SoundBitesBody*, initiated, curated and facilitated by Blue Mountains artist Weizen Ho. It was first conceived as a monthly event at the cocktail lounge in Katoomba's Paragon Café, involving the 'growing community of phonic-makers and improvisational practitioners who have located themselves in the mountains'.[30] The project has since taken place in a series of private houses and other venues across the Blue Mountains. Because the works were primarily in occupied homes, Soundbites gave the artists just a couple of hours to 'dwell' on what they might create. This meant that, in the mix of practice, site and material, the artists often relied on their toolbox of improvisational skills when interacting with each other and the space (pers. comm. WeiZen Ho, March 2022).

In 2014, 2015 and 2016, I participated in the Redfern Biennales initiated by Damien Minton, whose gallery was on Elizabeth Street, down the road from a Redfern housing estate. Minton told me at the time that he invited artists based on whether he thought they could handle the short lead time – we were given very short notice of when these events would take place – and the other constraints of the process. We were asked to make work in and around the three large street blocks that had low-rise red brick flats separated by trees and areas of dirt and grass. As with the MAP projects and Soundbites, the work was to be up for a limited time – one Saturday, from 10am to 6pm. The annual 'biennales' were guerrilla events; that is, Minton had not sought permission from the Sydney City Council, but the council seemed to take a benign view over the three years they took place. Minton had connected with some of the residents as they passed by or dropped into his gallery and they had formed an art group whose work he had shown and were keen to participate in the event.

[30] https://www.weizenho.com/soundbitesbody - /sound-bites-body/.

For each of these annual 'biennales', Minton would put the word out a week or two before, giving us very little time to think about what we might make, but considerably more time for site visits than the two Blue Mountains projects. For the first one, I visited the area and walked about the place for a while, discovering pleasant three-storey liver-brick dwellings with large wooden sash windows surrounded by largely unkempt gardens with patchy grass and dirt under huge trees. Since the exhibition was guerrilla and most of the gardens were behind fences, what remained to work with were the footpaths and the verges. The haste with which the show had been convened lent an urgency to the visit – it felt like I couldn't take my time, that I had to force things, pay close attention to the place – but in the end it was the atmosphere, the power of the peripheral perhaps, that generated the idea. The footpaths were a bit down at heel, some buckling up over tree roots, and the whole place seemed to be asking for some cheering up. Hopscotch, I thought. I stocked up with coloured chalk and spent the day of the biennale shimmying along on a wheeled dolly drawing *Hopscotch* (2014), starting at Minton's gallery door at 10am and winding my way through and around the blocks, ending up at 6pm at square 978. Throughout the day, people came up to me for a chat, locals reminiscing about hopscotching as kids, visitors hopping along and being surprised to find me at the end, still drawing. I downed tools at 6pm and left the bucket of chalk in case anyone wanted to keep on going. As I made my way home I saw another artist had attached a text-based work to a fence near where the hopscotch began, with the words 'Where do the children play?'. A friend went to see the hopscotch on Sunday but it had already been entirely removed by Council. I thought surely it was an odd coincidence that two weeks later an amendment was passed to the NSW *Graffiti Control Act 2008* saying the Act 'does not apply to the marking of any public footpath or pavement with chalk, including, but not limited to, marking out a hopscotch or handball court with chalk.'

In the two subsequent biennales, I came to the site with a child's desk, the kind that has a map on the desktop, and found a spot right beside a footpath in an open area under the shade of a tree for *The Accommodation Desk* (2015) and *Memory Game* (2016). Both works relied on passersby to sit down and, in the first work, to have a conversation with me about our respective housing situations, and in the second, to play one of those memory games where we try to remember where the matching pairs are in a face-down grid of cards, only this time we made our own pairs before playing, adding them to the

ever-growing game. Artist and scholar Ross Gibson writes on the blog of his *Conversations II* work at the 2008 Biennale of Sydney that the work came from a 'naïve impulse: to grow a world of thinking and feeling and talking, a turning world that, which each uttered transaction grows richer than the sum of its individual speakers' (Gibson 2008, n. p.). My two conversational works came from the same naïve impulse. The pairs of cards were made to represent something about the places where we lived. To start the game off I made a first pair to show people what I had in mind. I had been having a very tough time in my share house that year and so I covered the pre-cut cardboard squares with squares of some scratchy yellow sandpaper that I had grabbed as I dashed out of the house that morning running late after another upsetting encounter with my flatmate. I laid out the rest of the sandpaper and other materials for people to use when drawing and glueing things onto their squares. It was not long before a woman and young daughter passing by saw me sitting hopefully behind the desk and sat down to help, or that is how it seemed. After I had explained the game and why I had made my first scratchy pair – how it represented the scratchy relationship I had with my flatmate – we got down to work to build up the number of pairs so we could start to play. The woman made a yellow sun pair out of the same scratchy sandpaper (see figure 22), and when I asked her if that was because her home was a happy place she said, 'no, I made that pair for you'. I was so touched by this simple gesture of understanding and support that the distress I had brought with me from home that morning was washed away. She then made a pair that said 'NO DRAMAS', while her daughter made 'Swimming pool'. She said they had once lived in the neighbourhood and these descriptions were of their new home in another suburb. They were there to visit old friends and I didn't want to keep them long so we played a quick game with the few pairs we had and they went on their way.


**Figure 22** Emma Wise, *Memory Game* (detail), 2015.

In 2012, Lisa Andrew and Bronia Iwanczak curated The Appin Labyrinth, a show that took place over one afternoon in eleven of the rooms at the Appin Motel in Appin on the outskirts of Sydney to the south-west. The rooms at the Appin Motel are separate raised cabins with a small flight of steps up to each door. Each of the artists had limited access to the rooms beforehand with only a morning to set up before the exhibition opened for five hours in the afternoon as permanent residents of the place watched on from the steps of the on-site Chinese restaurant. The performance works by Mark Shorter and Tina Havelock-Stevens are both examples of the way artists adapt a very particular practice to a specific situation, a technique often used when there is little time to dwell in a place, to take on an abode. Tina Havelock-Stevens' drumming work *Mad Dog Ghost Fart* 2012 is described on Stevens' website as a:

> Site specific Installation in Appin Motel
> *Born in Appin, bushranger Mad Dog Morgan drifts between liminal drumming spirits, Dennis Hopper and ephemeral ode –arama*
> Video installation & Spontaneous Composition channelling Mad Dog Morgan
> 5 hr durational performance

Havelock-Stevens is known for drumming up a place and in this case she drummed up a famous bearded Australian bushranger who was born in Appin with a durational performance in one of the rooms, dressed in shirt and trousers and with fake beard attached. Mark Shorter performed *Dark Contact* 2012 with a shocking iteration of his

character Schleimgurgeln, who appears virtually naked and covered in feathers and 'represents an imagined incarnation of the European Other within Australian Space'.[31] Here in the remote Appin Motel, nestled in the bush on the outskirts of Sydney, the work played into Hollywood hotel horror films such as *Psycho* and *The Shining* and was terrifying.

The cabins were small and visitors had little idea of what might be inside. At the top of Shorter's cabin's flight of a few rickety stairs, I opened the door to complete darkness. Closing the door again I could hear the sound of water dripping in the far-left corner. I inched my way toward the sound, careful not to trip, hands held out in front of me, thinking this was a very creepy and minimalist sound work. I was getting close to the sound when at the flick of a lighter, I was face to face with a semi-naked man tarred and black feathered from top to toe. I shrieked. Shorter had been standing by the bathroom door where the noise was coming from, waiting for me to make my way towards the sound. The light went out and, plunged back into darkness, I made my way back to the door just as someone else was entering. Later I discovered that Shorter's character's emotionally violent physical intrusion into the domestic space of this place echoed the violence of the massacre of local indigenous people at Appin in the early years of settlement. Clearly both Havelock-Stevens and Shorter had solved the tricky issue of minimal site visits through researching the area and not confining their response to the rooms alone. Alex Gawronski, on the other hand, for *Partition* 2012 in Room 14, had paid close attention to the details of the room itself. Site took the upper hand in the relationship between site, materials and practice – Jane Bennett's thing power was hard at work. According to Gawronski, the work 'took the regional setting of the Appin Hotel as its starting point, further taking into account the traces of any preexisting art in Room no. 14.' As with Bertram's works, the work was so seamless I had to look hard to see it – there was a static video of the room's number playing on the television between the beds and a further copy of the copy of Van Gogh's Irises that had been jammed behind the microwave, this one 'shoved equally inauspiciously on top of the hotel cupboard'.[32]

[31] http://markshorter.com.au/home/schleimgurgeln-arrival/.
[32] https://alexgawronski.com/2010-2012/2-2012-ii/.

On the night of 21 November 2020, as part of Canberra's You Are Here festival, a house in suburban Canberra was occupied by the works of seven artists for a project called Lit Windows. All works were designed to be viewed from the outside, conforming to the covid constraints of the time. Nicci Haynes was one of the artists who back-projected her work *Phenahoistamation* onto the windows from the inside. The windows she chose included a vertical series of three panes that evoked film frames, matching the projected animation, for which Haynes had filmed herself spinning around the hills hoist in the back yard. Haynes says, 'I could have put anything in the windows but I didn't want to do that, I wanted to do something in response to the house.' The artists had about six weeks to make the works and Haynes, whose practice regularly incorporates animation, says: 'Quite quickly I locked onto the hills hoist and the idea of making it into a giant animation machine but there was very little funding and no time for such a big task so I decided on a filmed animation instead.' (Nicci Haynes, pers. comm., November 2020). In the making of this work, Haynes drew on her familiar practice of filmed animation while embracing the unfamiliar – Haynes' practice rarely involves site-responsivity – to create a work that neatly balanced the influences of the site (the hoist, the windows) and her own familiar toolbox.[33]

*Unoccupied*

There is a long history of houses converted into museum spaces, houses no longer lived in that have become formal spaces for the exhibition of art, such as the Lewers House gallery, as mentioned previously, and Heide I (John and Sunday Reed's original farmhouse) and Heide II (the modernist 'gallery to be lived in' they commissioned in 1964) at the Heide Museum of Modern Art.[34] Although some of these houses have been gifted to the state by the artists who lived and worked in them or their descendants, their transformation into galleries means it is difficult for artists to work in them in ways that are different from working in a standard gallery white cube.

[33] https://www.instagram.com/p/CIl17ogh-wK/.
[34] https://www.heide.com.au/about/heide-story.

Unlike the house museums mentioned above, Calthorpes' House in Canberra, described in the Introduction, is one of many unoccupied historic house museums across Australia where the contents have been preserved or reassembled and that have opened their doors to contemporary art. For example, at Meroogal House in Nowra, the annual Meroogal Women's Art Prize, in its eighteenth year in 2020, asks female artists in NSW working in any medium to respond the house and 'its fascinating history and collection of treasures'.[35] The 2020 prize winner, Sarah Goffman, is an artist whose work fits neatly into the historic house. Since 2008/9 she has been painting plastic vessels with the blue and white patterns associated with precious china. While it is not clear how much time she spent dwelling in the place, for her winning work she delved into her trusty toolbox and inserted some of these vessels, and others decorated with patterned lacework, into an arrangement of cut-glass objects on an elegant dresser (figure 23). Meroogal is a long way from a large city and some artists may find it difficult to make their way there for a site visit – one recent finalist who had no time for such a visit told me she sent her embroidery work down in the hope that it would find a place, thinking that such an item might appear as though made for the place, and it did.

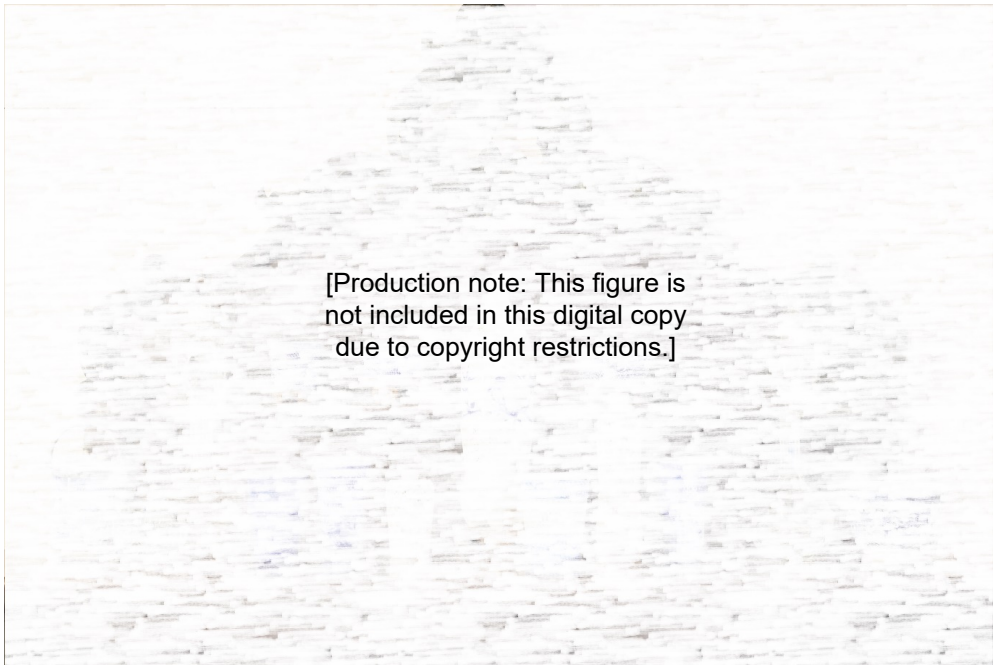


**Figure 23** Sarah Goffman, *Blue willow*, 2020. Image: Sydney Living Museums, see footnote 32.

[35] https://sydneylivingmuseums.com.au/2020/09/23/meroogal-womens-art-prize-2020-winners-announcement.

Elizabeth Bay House in Sydney is another that has hosted exhibitions of contemporary art including Artists in the House 1997, for which 'some of Sydney's foremost contemporary installation artists engage with the house and its collections to create a series of site-specific installations which re-examined the heritage, social and scientific values of Elizabeth Bay House for a contemporary society'.[36] Art historian Hedvig Mårdh seems to acknowledge Jane Bennett's thing power when she writes of the agency an historic house can have:

> The historic house involves a different type of agency than a regular exhibition space. However, what exactly the house can bring to art varies from house to house. It also depends on the artwork; the house can act as an assertive backdrop or as an integral part of the work' (Mårdh 2015, p. 32).

Gardens are an integral part of the lived-in places they belong to and the gardens of some of these historic houses have also been opened up to artists. *Pleasure Garden*, Genevieve Lacey's interactive audio installation in the Pleasure Garden in the grounds of Vaucluse House for the Sydney Festival 2016 is an example of how difficult it can be to, first, make a work for an outdoor space that incorporates technology and, second, make that work remotely. Lacey is based in Melbourne and the long reflective essay on the website explains her process, which involved a year of recording and testing and listening in studios and gardens in her home town and with collaborators overseas, culminating in a final test garden presentation in Melbourne. It is not clear how much time Lacey had at Vaucluse House apart from the days immediately before the opening when she was testing and adapting the work to the site. On her website, the artist writes of *Pleasure Garden*: 'Musically, the work is subtle, in order to create room for visitors to dream, to play and to think' (Lacey n. d.). As I walked around the winding paths of the pretty pleasure garden, stopping here and there to listen, faint sounds could occasionally be heard, but nothing like the richness of the music for the project presented on her website.[37] Lacey describes the project as adaptable to any garden, cutting it loose from the site the original work was intended for.

[36] https://sydneylivingmuseums.com.au/exhibitions/artists-house.
[37] https://genevievelacey.com/works/pleasure-garden/.

Although not an historic house, Government House, Sydney, is both a public and a private space, and was opened up in 2003 for an exhibition of art in the gardens and floral installations in the downstairs rooms. Normally the house is the formal residence of the Governor of New South Wales, but the then-Governor Marie Bashir chose not to live there, although she used it for receptions and official purposes. My work *Tree Fern Polka* was a response to a request by the organisers to make artwork that was family friendly (figure 24). As I wandered about the place the thing power of this grove of coin-spot tree ferns was irresistible – the 'coin spots', which are rounded indentations left when fronds age and drop off, seemed to be asking to be coloured in like a Dr Seuss book. This work, which responded to the finer details of the site, is the first time I used what would become my sole familiar toolbox material – paper. A requirement of the show was to make good afterward, so I cut pink tissue paper rounds to fit the coin spots and stuck them on with flour and water so they could be washed off easily without harming the tree ferns.

**Figure 24** Emma Wise, *Tree Fern Polka* 2003, Government House, Sydney.

As mentioned previously, art historian Hedvig Mårdh (2015) writes of the relationship between historic houses and art that is made within them that 'the house can act as an assertive backdrop or as an integral part of the work' (p. 32). She also writes that house museums 'have the great potential and power of being a "real place" filled with an

excellent collection of real things' (p. 28). It follows then that completely empty historic houses should offer a less 'assertive backdrop'. For the Biennale of Sydney in 1998, British artist Martin Creed produced *Half the air in a given space* in the old harbourmaster's house on Goat Island, just west of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. To create this work he half-filled this entirely empty two-storey weatherboard cottage with blown up regular sized creamy white balloons. The windows were closed and an exhibition minder stood by the front door and carefully let people in and out so the balloons did not escape. From the outside, the house looked normal, until I noticed the balloons crowding up against the windows. Once I was inside, in most of the rooms the balloons were above head height and, putting my hand up, they were sometimes up to the ceiling. When I was underneath, which was most of the time, it was like moving in a private creamy bubbly world. The light coming through the white balloons was warm and unless I crouched down to the floor or found my way to a wall, I couldn't see anything but the balloons in front of my face. Most people in the house were quiet, with the occasional 'oh!' or 'sorry' as we came unexpectedly upon one another. These encounters were a complete surprise as there were general soft squeakings and rubbings and soft bumping and rustling sounds all the time so it was impossible to tell if anyone was coming from a particular direction.

Although Creed has half-filled multiple sites around the world with his monochromatic balloon pieces, drawing on his toolbox for both material and practice, Briony Fer writes that 'Rather than a parody of a certain type of art making, or even a sabotage of a certain type of art, this seems more a question of how you make an artwork out of materials that may not seem to amount to much but which expand – as well as literally inflate – our sense of colour as a material like any other (Fer 2011, pp. 12–13)'. Creed often uses gold, and deep purple and red, and he has used white balloons before, but never in a space such as this. The creamy whiteness of these balloons lent a lightness to the experience, and reflected the unassuming nature of this well-made, well-kept, charming wooden structure. Red or purple would have created an entirely different experience. Did Creed dwell for a time in Sydney or in this house before making this work? Or spend time in the house itself pondering on its shape and how its shape might relate to balloons of different colours? Brigita Ozolins (2014, n. p.), who experienced the Goat Island work writes, 'Creed's work demonstrates how the simplest of

strategies…has created a humorous yet powerful experience… The strategy here is simple, but the experience is complex.' The house, despite being empty, quietly asserted itself.

This chapter has discussed how contemporary artists make through dwelling, arguing that when artists are able to take their time in an artist residency, the power of the site can greatly influence the work, while at other times urgent site visits, or living far from the site, mean artists can tend to rely on familiar materials and practices, or research about a place, to make a site-responsive work. The chapter notes that, conversely, artists may spend an extended period of time dwelling in a place and still rely on familiar practices, as in the works of Healy and Cordeiro, and that responses to a site can also come to an artist in a flash. The chapter argues that performance works can sidestep the pressures of the short time available in advance of a project, allowing the artist to use the time spent dwelling *during* the project to work with the site. The chapter then argues that whether a work is made in historic houses filled with objects and their gardens, or houses empty or unlived in, the thing power of these types of sites has a strong influence on the work made there. The next chapter discusses how artists have used their own personal belongings to make work and how, again, Jane Bennett's thing power – the agency of these objects – operates in these works.

## Chapter 2 Inside out

Jane Bennett's aspiration through her invocation of the power of things is 'to articulate a vibrant materiality that runs alongside and inside humans to see how analyses of political events might change if we gave the force of things their due'.[38] Using Bennett's thing power as a guide, this research attempts to articulate the vibrant materiality that runs alongside and inside humans and to give the force of things their due when analysing the works of artists. There is a long history of the use of found materials, from Picasso's collages to Marcel Duchamp's readymades, but this chapter discusses the use of 'found' materials or objects that once belonged in an artist's own home, or in someone else's home, to create an artwork outside the home.

Where artists have used material from inside their own or other people's houses as the stuff of their work, this stuff is often presented en masse. A single object can have agency – the power to evoke strong emotions, convey meaning, communicate, connect people – often through the story we tell about it, or the memories we hold of similar objects, or simply the object's physicality.[39] With a huge collection, the thing power of the individual objects combines with the amount of time invested in collecting, the obsessive nature of the selection, the desire to keep these things. Taking Bennett's lead, the vibrant materiality 'that runs alongside and inside humans' combines in the production of the work of art. Time also plays a significant role in the creation of these works, particularly when the work involves the artist in a performative or storytelling role for the duration of the exhibition or for some part of it – the same kind of dwelling that occurred in the making of the performative works discussed in chapter 1, but in this case dwelling with the material away from its original location. In this chapter I discuss the performative works I have made with my own belongings, in particular, the Stuff series that forms part of the creative component of this research.

Perhaps the most well-known of this type of work is Chinese artist Song Dong's *Waste Not* (2005), an installation of more than ten thousand objects collected over

[38] Bennett, p. vii.
[39] See Ilaria Vanni Accarigi's work on objects and memory including her chapter 'Transcultural objects, transcultural homes' in Justine Lloyd & Ellie Vasta (eds) *Reimagining Home in the 21st Century* 2017, Elgar, pp. 192–206.

decades by the artist's mother and kept in her house. When I first encountered this work in 2009 at MOMA in New York, I understood it to be a kind of in memoriam (Song's mother died in 2009) but subsequently discovered it to be a work he developed while she was still alive. Art critic John McDonald writes, 'Song Dong initially conceived of the installation as a kind of therapy to cure his mother of her compulsive hoarding, which had taken on a pathological dimension since the death of his father in 2002.' In fact, the work has travelled around the world since it was first exhibited in Beijing in 2005, and I saw it again at Carriageworks in 2013 as part of the Sydney Festival's visual art program.

In its first showing, Song's mother arranged the articles and was present to engage with visitors to the project.[40] Song's mother died in 2009 and each time he remakes the exhibition he is helped by his sister Song Hui and his wife Xin Xiuzhen, 'the entire family is brought together again. Memories are rekindled and personal family objects are rediscovered, bringing powerful emotions to the fore.'[41] For Song:

> It's about the relationship with my mother, with my family, and the things I learned from them. The other relationship in my work is object to object. I organise the same things together. You can see very old shoes from my grandmother – her feet were bound – they were very small shoes. My mother's shoes were bigger, but very simple. My sister's shoes are simple and somethimes very cheap, other times very fashionable…I think it's interesting that the history of our lives can be conveyed through objects… My mother would keep all these objects for the future; her future was me. (c.2016, pp. 92, 93)

[40] https://www.johnmcdonald.net.au/2013/song-dong/.
[41] https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2012/feb/14/song-dong-waste-not-in-pictures.

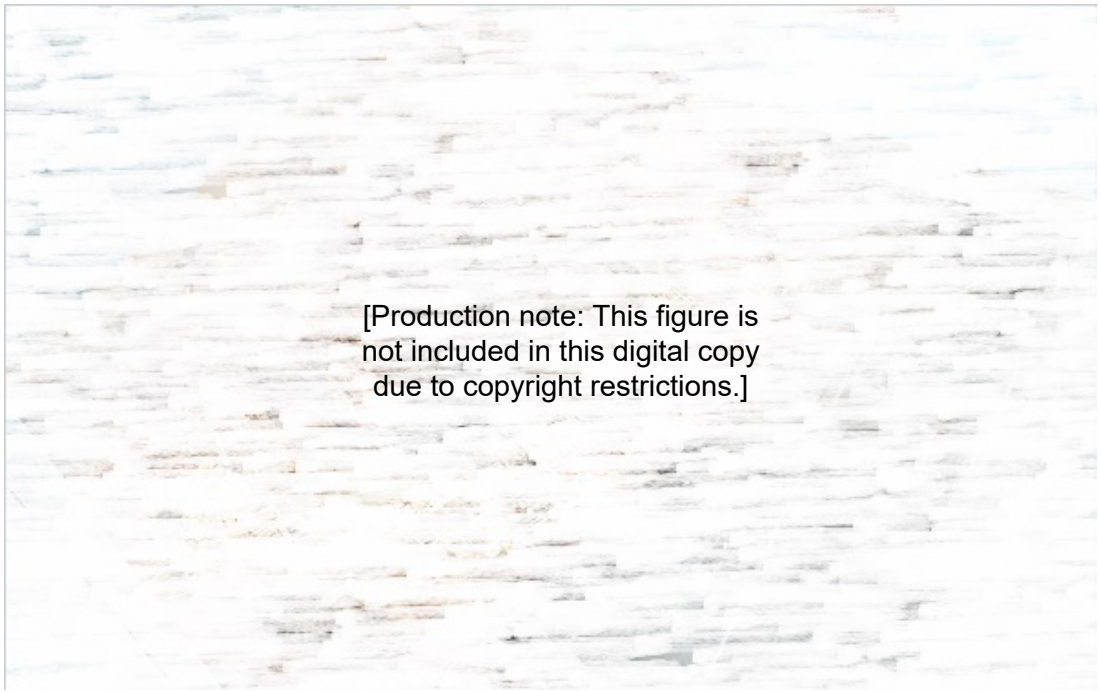


**Figure 25** Song Dong, *Waste Not*, (2005/2009) MOMA, New York. Image: MOMA.

According to art critic John MacDonald (2013), at first glance Song Dong's *Waste Not* (2005):

> resembles the 'accumulations' of artists such as Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro, or the late Jason Rhoades, but we quickly realise it is a completely different proposition. We may still be looking at a lot of junk, but it is meaningful junk, collected piece-by-piece by a single person because she thought it might come in handy one day.

For the artist, the power of this collection is in the memory of his mother. For those of us who missed its first performative iteration, as we look at the work in the absence of the stories and memories behind the objects, the power lies in the obsession we know must have driven the desire to keep these things and the length of time embodied in the sheer number of things laid out before us. In this way, following Bennett again, we see how the power of things runs alongside and through us. This is a collection of over ten thousand pieces 'worn, broken and occasionally unused' (curator Wu Hung quoted in Walker 2019, p. 149), but it is the ordering that allows us to feel the obsession that gives the collection its particular thing power. Song Dong acknowledges the importance of this ordering, what he calls the relationship of object to object, in the work. There are so many sets of similar objects, for example, empty toothpaste tubes. If all these things

were simply gathered into a pile, yes, it would have the power of its mass, but the power of obsession as it manifests over time would be lost.

My collection of objects for *Evacuation (Wednesday 23 October 2013)*, was much more specific, but like *Waste Not*'s first iteration, similarly performative (figure 26). A few weeks prior to the exhibition at Articulate project space in Leichhardt, I had driven a car load of stuff from my house in the Blue Mountains past the gallery on Parramatta Road as I fled potentially catastrophic fire conditions. The crisis passed and I returned home. I brought the stuff back down to make this work, and sat in Articulate speaking with visitors to the exhibition about the things I had chosen to save that day.

**Figure 26** Emma Wise, *Evacuation (Wednesday 23 October 2013)*, 2013.

The power of some of the objects was in the memories they held, for others it was their materiality – the velvety pillow, artworks I loved to look at. I showed visitors

photographs of the smoke billowing above the M4 and a video of a tiny helicopter against a towering wall of smoke as Winmalee and Yellow Rock went up in flames. A surprising number of people who sat down to chat had their own stories of evacuation and what they wanted to save. The objects alongside us had the power to catalyse conversation and provoke a flow of memories that flooded the gallery. This was the first work made with my own belongings.


**Figure 27** Emma Wise, *Stuff* (installation view), 2019.

I have since used my own belongings to make the Stuff series of works, and this series is part of the creative practice component of this research. The first work was *Stuff* (2019), for which I delved into the jumble of stuff in my mother's attic and brought

everything of mine to an upstairs corner of Articulate project space, under the reflected light of the massive orange storage facility just across Parramatta Road from the space (figure 27). The idea was to give everything away. That year had been a hard one: a cascade of events over the preceding six months had culminated in my father, who has dementia, living in an aged care home; my mother had been diagnosed with stage 3 melanoma, and there had been four deaths – an aunt and an uncle and two friends. I had been invited to exhibit a work in the show and although I did not have everything that had happened in mind when thinking about what work I would make, a friend was alarmed. She read the work as a nihilistic reaction to the year I had experienced. And maybe it was – the power of the peripheral, if you could call those events peripheral. Apart from some clothes, a radio, a bed light and his mobility scooter (he can't feel his feet), my father has four personal things in his room at that aged care place – photographs of his great grandparents 'Daniel and Hannah' from the dining room of the family home; a painting of hydrangeas from the living room; and, from his study, an old photograph of Nielsen Park beach, where he used to swim every day.

I spent the three weeks of the exhibition sorting through my stuff, chatting to visitors, giving things away. As with *Evacuation*, the objects powered conversations between strangers, generating curiosity, acquisitiveness and even, in the case of a particularly confronting artwork I was hoping to give away, disgust. Powerful emotions generated by an innocuous looking pile of stuff. Unlike Australian artist Domenico de Clario, who buried his possessions (see discussion below), I wanted to find another home for these objects. I wanted to give them to people who really wanted them.

I had imagined that after giving away and chucking decades worth of stuff thrown in boxes and shoved up in the roof – time capsules of hasty exits from houses or the city or the country – I would end up with an empty corner on the last weekend. I did get close. Most people said they had enough stuff already; and then were drawn in by the power of these things and took something away anyway (figure 28).


**Figure 28** Happy divestees with their booty amongst *Stuff*, 2019, including the cake tin later used by recipient and sent with Xmas cake inside to a friend.

As people rummaged around they found things I had not remembered for years, and there were some things I later regretted giving away in the excitement of opening night. This regret was quite a surprise – the need to retrieve these few items was powerful and led to a work *Stuff back* 2021, which began as a formal return of one of my grandmother's hats (figure 29).

**Figure 29** Emma Wise, *Stuff back*, 2021, one of my grandmother's hats, returned.

Object and memory is a powerful combination, I discovered. Unlike Song Dong's mother, both my grandmother and now my mother began sorting their stuff and giving it away in their 80s, but it was after my very stylish grandmother died that I claimed two of her hats. As I made my way home after opening night I realised with a pang of emotion that I needed to ask if I could have those hats back. Some awkward negotiations later and a year or so of covid lockdowns and a hat swap was arranged for the hat in figure 29, and after hearing about this, the friend I had given the other hat to volunteered to return it as well.

**Figure 30** Emma Wise, *Stuff 2 (papers)*, 2020.

After the three weeks of *Stuff* 2019, much of what remained was boxes of papers that no one could or did want – remarkably powerless, or so it seemed – and these became the basis for *Stuff 2 (papers)* 2020 (figure 30). For this work I went beyond the boxes from my mother's attic and gathered additional papers from my own house. I spent the duration of the exhibition undertaking a massive sorting process, choosing to keep or chuck, still chatting and giving stuff away. An article on freak waves I had cut out years ago was happily carried off by someone who swims at Bronte, an odd necklace I almost remembered appeared at the bottom of a box and found the perfect new owner, and decades of paper was recycled out of my life. As with *Stuff* 2019, I have my regrets. Those pieces of paper, the vast majority of which had no power over other people, turned out to be extraordinarily powerful in my hands. Tiny scraps of paper triggered hosts of memories, pay slips from jobs I had completely forgotten and, no doubt, will now forget again, contact details for people I had met travelling who had slipped from my mind. I realised afterwards with some regret that because I had thrown most of these

things away, the process had been a one-off trip down memory lane and I thought of Song Dong's work, and how those objects were and are keeping family memories alive.

British artist Michael Landy and Australian artist Domenico de Clario are two other artists who have spent time disposing of their belongings as part of their practice. Over two weeks in 2001, with the help of 12 assistants, Landy destroyed everything he owned for his work *Break Down*, leaving himself with nothing but the blue boiler suit he was wearing. 'It was the happiest two weeks of my life,' Landy told art critic Alastair Sooke in 2016. 'At moments, admittedly, I felt like I was witnessing my own death, because people I hadn't seen for years would turn up, and I thought, "Well, they'd only turn up for my funeral." But often I did feel real elation. No one had ever destroyed all their worldly belongings before.'[42]

Australian artist Domenico de Clario created a work in 2016 that similarly involved the disposal of possessions and also evoked death and dying. However, instead of destroying objects as Landy did, for *Tonglen* he buried a wide assortment of his own and his deceased parents' possessions, including two cars, in a vast pit near Mildura in Victoria. He described the work to ABC journalist Lauren Henry as:

> The interment, or burial, of all the objects I've used in 30 to 40 years of installations, as well as furniture, clothes, letters, books, my children's toys, parents' possessions, and various bits and pieces from my life that are no longer in use… The desire is for everything to stay together and safe under the soil, so nothing has gone to the tip or has been discarded or destroyed…[43]

While Landy's experience of 'witnessing his own death' seemed to take him by surprise, and I created my Stuff disposal works without having my ailing father or the deaths of family and friends that year in mind, de Clario's burial makes the association obvious, and indeed he told Henry the work had 'probably more got to do with the passing away of both of my parents in the past two or three years, and I think it's probably time to let a lot of things go'.[44]

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[42] https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20160713-michael-landy-the-man-who-destroyed-all-his-belongings.
[43] https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-09-22/artist-buries-lifelong-possessions-for-arts-sake/7868322.
[44] Ibid.

Like Landy, I felt real elation during the process of giving my stuff away, and I too connected with old friends – I took a piano stool back to a friend from school I had not seen in decades and sent *Good Weekend* magazines from the 1990s to a Danish friend who had lived in Australia at the time – but on reflection it did seem, as my friend worried about nihilism had surmised, that the process had been a step towards death. And I realise that my regrets arising from *Stuff 2 (papers)* could be connected to my father and his loss of memory and consequent loss of self. 'Who am I?' he asks, and then remembers, 'oh, yes'.

This chapter has discussed how the power of things can be revealed when an artist uses their own belongings in their work, how this power can lie in a personal object's deep connection to the memory and narrative of our lives, and how the emotions unleashed by these connections can be surprisingly strong. The next chapter discusses how several artists have worked with to-be-demolished, abandoned or empty houses. Such houses provide artists the opportunity to interfere with the fabric of the house itself, creating works that challenge ideas of home.

## Chapter 3 To-be-demolished, abandoned or empty

This chapter discusses artwork created using complete houses or parts of houses that, as a result of the artmaking, will never again function as houses or homes. The chapter seeks to answer an additional research question: When a complete house is abandoned, empty or to be demolished and all or part of it becomes an artwork, what becomes of home? While research on the meaning of home reveals it can mean different things to different people (Blunt & Dowling 2006; Lloyd & Vasta 2017; Mallett 2004), Blunt and Dowling in their '*critical geography of home'* describe it as 'a *place*, a site in which we live. But more than this, home is an idea and an imaginary imbued with feelings' (2006, p. 2). Home for me is a feeling as much as a place in which we live and the feeling of home is a feeling of safety. Unoccupied houses slated for demolition offer artists the opportunity to significantly disturb the structure of a house, rendering it unsafe and unhomely. The chapter will focus on the work of artist duo Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro and that of Ian Strange, artists that have made many works with these types of houses. The chapter discusses their work in the context of the work of key non-Australian predecessors in the to-be-demolished house-as-material field, Gordon Matta-Clark and Rachel Whiteread, and the work of Tony Cragg, an artist who has spent much of his career working with the idea of stacking stuff.

### *Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro*

For *The Cordial Home Project* 2003 at Artspace in Sydney, Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro looked for an unwanted house they could acquire for free in exchange for its removal from the block. Their initial idea was to demolish the house, package the bits and display the 'elemental packaged scrap' in the exhibition space (Healy and Cordeiro quoted in Chapman 2003). In the end, they got the house demolished, transported the bits to Artspace, Woolloomooloo in Sydney and carefully ordered the constituent parts in layers from the brick foundations at the bottom to the roof tiles at the top (figure 31).

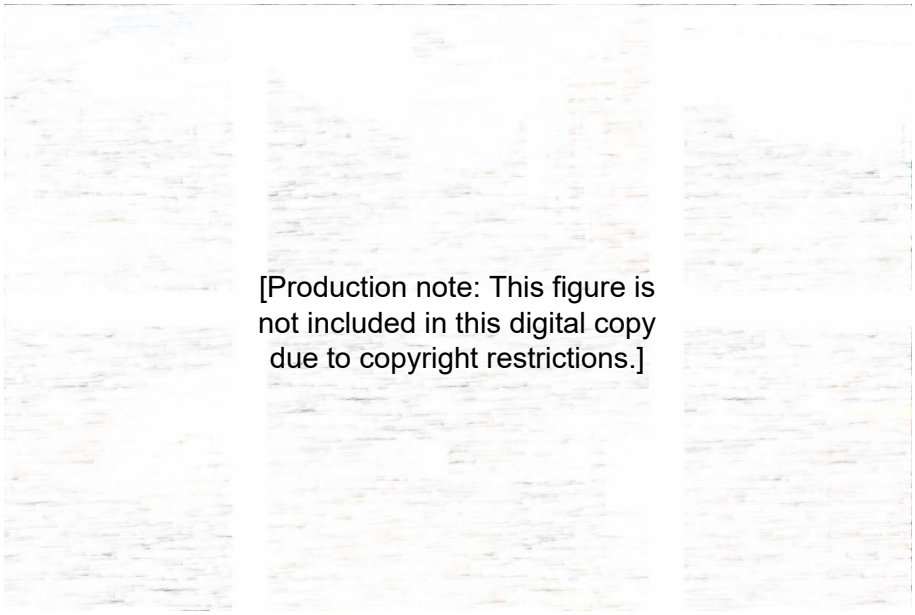


**Figure 31** Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro, *Cordial Home Project,* 2003. Type C LED prints, 6. Museum of Contemporary Art, purchased with funds provided by the Coe and Mordant families, 2006. Image: © the artists, photograph: Liz Ham.

Just as they, and others like them in precarious work, have been squeezed out of the Sydney housing market, for this installation they squeezed the domestic space out of the house they dismantled. Their wish was in part 'to highlight the absurd delusion of two young artists owning a home in Sydney' (Healy and Cordeiro quoted in Gallasch 2003), the idea perhaps being that this unhomely artwork – the absence of much domestic detritus amongst the compressed fabric of the house directs us to the more basic concept of shelter – is the closest they would ever get to owning their own house. Nevertheless, their original idea of packaging elemental scrap indicates a desire to convey the essence of something, the title of the piece tells us it is the essence of home, and when discussing the work, many scholars talk about the distillation of home:

> *The Cordial Home Project* both distills and crushes the ideals of suburbia into an economical and dense object…that radically increases the physical density of a suburban home, and compresses its psychological and social symbolism into something akin to dark matter (Chapman 2003, p. 39).

There is indeed a (literal) crushing of suburbia here, but rather than a distillation, of suburbia or of ideas of home, the work seems to be a solid refusal of it. The materiality of the work the artists have constructed has moved beyond their original concept and the name they have given it, for this collapsed structure rejects any possibility of a home

within. With no room to move, the only formal sign of the life once lived here or of movement of any kind are the few pipes fixed to the exterior of the block, running up and down between layers, and some telephone wires looping out the sides. David Burrows (n.d.) comments on the foul smell of the installation, the decay of whatever life existed within, and an element of the project which no documentation photographs could convey.

Where Healy and Cordeiro collapsed the space of home for their work, Rachel Whiteread reified home to make *House* (1993), literally concretising the living space of a Victorian terrace house in London by casting its interior and then removing the exterior (figure 32). So, unlike *The Cordial Home Project*, for those visiting Whiteread's work, the only parts of the original house that remained in view amongst the concretised living spaces were the edges of the supports, the brick walls and the timbers between the floors. It is not clear how she came to the project, but Whiteread has spent much of her career casting domestic spaces and to cast a whole house is the culmination of that familiar practice.

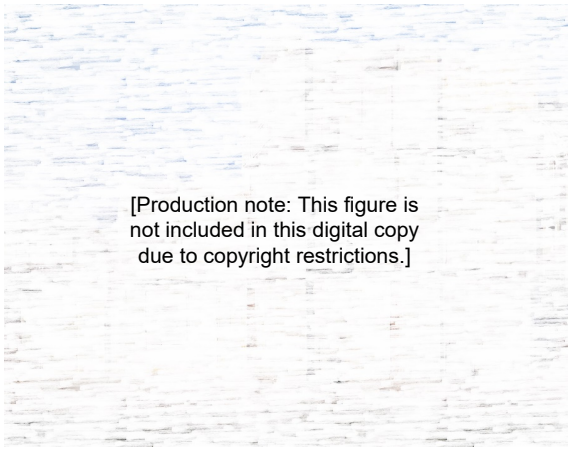


**Figure 32** Rachel Whiteread, *House*, 1993, Bow, East London. Image: © Rachel Whiteread.

Notes on the Tate website describe the work as 'made by spraying liquid concrete into the building's empty shell before its external walls were removed', which gives the same impression that the work itself does – that the entire living space has been replaced by concrete. Iwona Blazwick, director of Whitechapel Gallery, London, reflecting on the work in 2019, says, '*House* was an architectural death mask of a domestic space and of a century of its inhabitants', and although, according to Jon Bird (1995), 'the home as the site of memory' is a fundamental theme running through

Whiteread's work, and much has been made of the traces in the concrete of the interior life of the house, the impressions of light switches and fireplaces, just as a death mask sucks colour from a face, hollows cheeks and flattens eyebrows, this cast obliterates more history than it preserves, flattening the patterns of the wallpaper and the lino into a series of largely blank walls. The point of a death mask is its surface – the person's face/head reproduced in plaster to create a likeness of the dead person – so whether they are hollow as some are, or not, makes little difference. However, if we delve into its making and look at images of its demolition (see Takac 2020), we realise *House* itself is hollow, and this does influence our reading of it. We know there is no solid and complete occupation of the original terrace's living space and through this knowledge the completeness of the displacement is undermined and the monumentality of the project is slightly diminished.

Returning to Healy and Cordeiro's work, Oliver Watts (2013), in his review of their survey show at the MCA, discusses *The Cordial Home Project* in relation to another artwork comprised of a stack of somewhat similar material:

> Unlike the celebration of built material seen in *Tony Cragg's Stack* (1975), this pile is particular and tells a singular history. If the old home is now demolished but reassembled, what has been lost in its transformation into installation? *Cordial Home Project* examines the differences between mere material, spatial and geographic siting, architecture and the ineffable lived experience of the 'home'.

Cragg began stacking as a student in the late 1960s, piling detritus from his studio into neat layered rectilinear forms, and he is still working with this idea fifty years later. One of his earliest piled works was the one Watts mentions, *Stack* (1975), which is in the Tate galleries collection in London. A short essay on the Tate website describes the work:

> Geometry meets random selection in this ordering of assorted detritus, which ranges from building materials to discarded magazines… *Stack* resembles a cross-section view of long-forgotten, buried rubbish. This reference both to geology and archaeology resounds throughout Cragg's career… Cragg's policy at the time was

not to preserve the materials used, but to recreate the sculpture anew each time. (Delaney 2001)

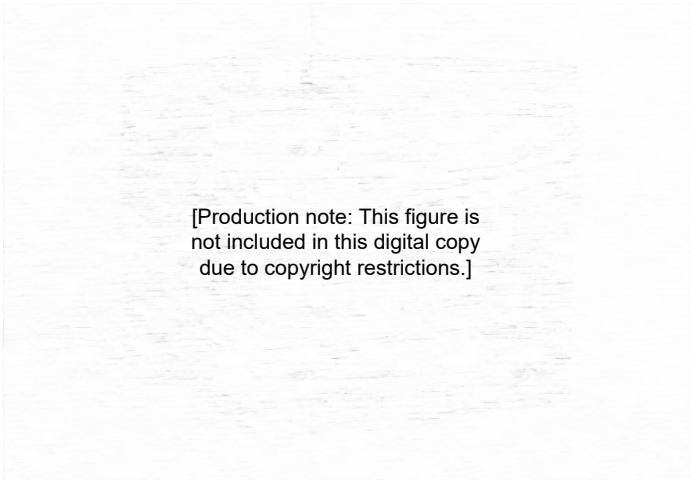


**Figure 33** Tony Cragg, *Stack*, 1975. Image: Tony Cragg, https://www.tony-cragg.com/.

The ordering Delaney refers to seems mostly to be a formal ordering into a solid cube, similar to Healy and Cordeiro's ordering of the house parts into a stack with four straight sides. The difference lies in the random selection and placement of the items within Cragg's stack. The image of *Stack* on Cragg's personal website, reproduced here, shows a very different selection of materials from the image of the Tate's version of the work (figure 33). Less rubbish, more the kind of materials he might have found lying around his studio, mostly bits of wood of various sizes, what look like papers or bits of cardboard. This remaking of the work without replicating it indicates that the particulars of the material are less important than the layering of the material and forming it into a cube. For Healy and Cordeiro, the particulars of the material are intrinsic to the work. They began with one intact object, a house, dismantled it and reassembled it into a stack that was highly ordered within. This allows the layers to be read from top to bottom, roof to foundations, as the elements of one house, collapsed. When Cragg talks about his stacking, he doesn't discuss it in terms of the material, or where the material comes from. For Cragg the stacks are not related to house and home, even when they are made up of building materials. For him the stacks are a layering of time, a telling of stories:

> We might also talk about 'storey' and 'story': the storeys of buildings and the stories of life. Telling 'histories' as telling 'stories' and recounting 'tales'. I think about 'telling' as 'narrating' but also about 'accounting' or 'recounting'. You might recount a tale and

> tell a history, for example, or account for yourself. Counting and accounting, telling and numbering, adding and accumulating... these words and ideas also introduce time and are part of a broader, bigger idea of history as layering or a layering upwards of deeper experiences. (Cragg quoted in Lisson Gallery press release 2019)

Many artists find satisfaction in this kind of counting and accounting, adding and accumulating, in taking the scattered, the miscellaneous or the multitudinous and performing some kind of ordering. For *Neither from nor towards* (1992) Cornelia Parker collected the water-worn bricks of houses that had fallen from the top of a sea cliff as it eroded and suspended them in an array that, from above, makes the basic shape of a square house with a pitched roof, arranged so the largest brick pieces at the base of the 'house' and closest to the floor graduate to the tiny pieces of the roof seemingly flying away. While the houseness of this installation is less immediately obvious than *The Cordial Home Project*, both are created from the remnants of a house or houses, and although the sea has taken everything but the bricks in Parker's work, the 'movement' in their implied levitation speaks to the same precarity of house and home Healy and Cordeiro reference in their work. This precarity is at the heart of the work as we imagine the houses cracking and sliding down the cliffs as the sea takes the land from beneath them. Parker (quoted in Sebag-Montefiore 2019), however, speaks of her suspended works as affording a kind of regeneration: 'That's what happens when I suspend [my work]. It is very like a morgue; [but] in the air they are reanimated.' For the work that propelled her into artworld stardom, *Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View* (1991), Parker got the army to blow up a garden shed, suspended the bits as though they had been arrested in midair as they flew outwards and then lit them from within: 'The blowing up was part of trying to disrupt something that was cosy and suburban, like the garden shed.' As with Tony Cragg's *Stack* (1975), each iteration of this work is different, with an emphasis on the overall effect rather than the exact placement of the items. Seeing it in person for the first time at the MCA in 2019 revealed a far greater number of domestic items amongst the broken bits of wood than had been apparent from photographs of the work and also highlighted the importance of the lighting, which scatters the objects otherwise confined to hanging below the square metal grid supporting them to create the effect of movement arrested.

Song Dong and his mother have performed another kind of ordering with the hoarded items from her house in *Waste Not* (figure 25) and, again, this work changes each time it is shown, although the items within the installation are still grouped like with like, all toothbrushes together, for example. In *Waste Not*, each piece of the whole is exposed, the accumulation of a lifetime kept and categorised and spread out for appraisal, given air. The stacks of Cragg and Healy and Cordeiro, on the other hand, are compressed into solid masses that can be read in passing as single objects.

Healy and Cordeiro continued stacking house and home for years after *The Cordial Home Project*, making a practice of ordering the stuff in the studios they occupied in residencies in Germany and Japan (as discussed in chapter 2) – into a ball, stacked floor to ceiling against a wall, arranged around a column – all the while storing their possessions in the Cordeiro family home back in Sydney to save money on rent. On returning home they made a work out of this stuff too. *Wohnwagen* 2006–2007 is the work that most resembles Cragg's *Stack*, in that the artists have stacked stuff into cube-like shapes of much the same size as his work, but again their work is made of one particular dismantled home, this time a mobile home – a caravan. In a nod to that mobility, the caravan has been broken down into pieces and carefully arranged on the kind of forklift-friendly pallets designed to transport goods the world over – an already unstable (mobile) home destroyed, and the remnants further destabilised as they are sent packing.

In 2008, still in a precarious living situation, the artists were again drawn to making work around the precarity of home. For the installation version of *Not Under My Roof* (2008), the artists cut the floor out of a derelict farmhouse in Millmerran, Queensland, rotated it 90 degrees from horizontal to vertical and placed it on a wall in the Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA) in Brisbane for the exhibition Contemporary Australia: Optimism (figure 34).

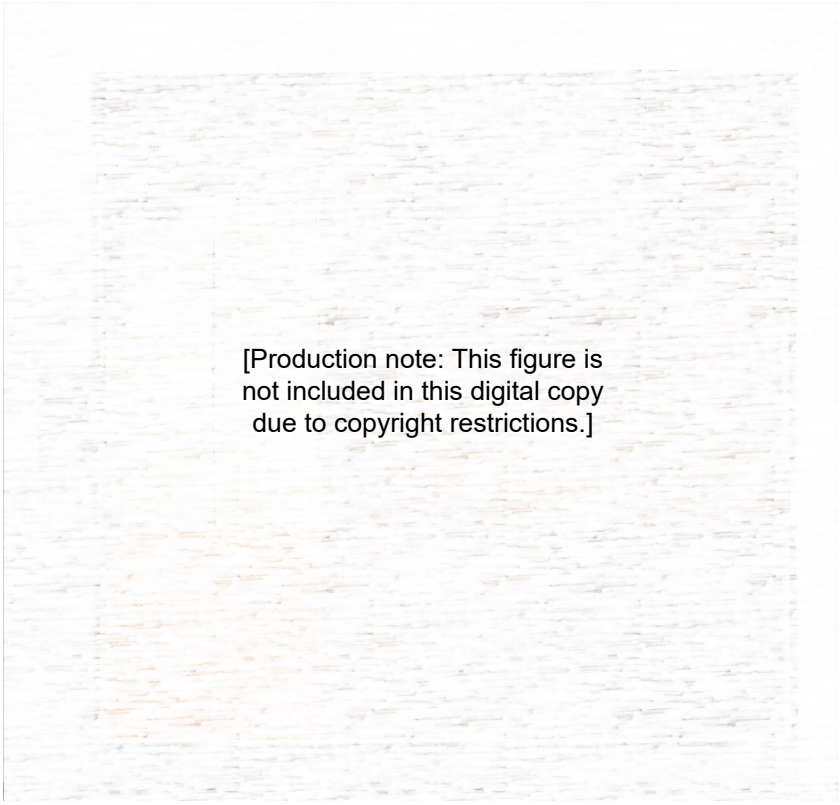


**Figure 34** Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro, *Not Under My Roof,* 2009. Type C photograph, Private collection, Sydney. Image: © the artists, photograph: Natasha Harth, Queensland Art Gallery.

When I saw it in the gallery I was in a hurry and I remember approaching the monumental work from the side, hastening past it thinking 'huge modernist painting' and then being arrested by the materiality at my elbow…is that lino? What is that 'frame'? Unable to fully grasp what I was seeing, I went to the wall label and saw it was a work by Healy and Cordeiro, who are unlikely to make a work from scratch. Reading on and…it was the floor of an entire house? On the wall next to the work there was a photograph of the intact farmhouse in its original location. I stepped back to have a proper look and the world tilted precariously around me. In one simple destabilising move the artists had, for a moment, entirely removed home from that old linoleum covered floor plate.

Russell Storer (2005) says, 'the safety zone of the gallery effectively neuters any sense of subversion or surprise' (n. p.), and although this can often be the case, it was not the case for me here. On the ground outside, or even on the floor in the gallery and it may have been neutered, but here on the wall this house in disguise was a surprise. I couldn't help laughing. I saw a lightheartedness in the title, which sounded as if the

house was talking to itself, but there was darkness too, as though the artists were describing their own situation, having no roof to call their own. In separating the floor from the house and hanging it on a wall, the artists had both removed and made unusable the basic element of support a house provides to the people in it. And looking at it there on the wall, whipped from beneath our feet and stuck in front of our eyes, with the modesty of furniture removed and the different worn linoleum patches exposed for all to see, I felt embarrassed for it.

An essay in the Asialink Centre *Unhomely* exhibition catalogue states:

> If the *house* is architecturally determined and finite in its spatial configuration, the *home*, because it is alternately a cultural, social, political, personal and psychological construct, eludes definition within any one set of material ideals or intangible desires. A sense of home, of spiritual location and belonging and the elemental necessity for the house are, of course, ubiquitous preoccupations that cross the boundaries of race, social background and gender. (1998, p. 5)

In separating the floor of this house from the rest of the structure, the house's spatial configuration becomes as indefinite in our imagination as the home it once was. As we look at the work, standing where the rest of the house would have been if it was still attached, projecting out from the wall, our imagination connects the place where we are standing to the place in the photograph on the wall of the intact farmhouse.

Storer's 'safety zone' also failed to neuter the subversion and surprise of Patricia Piccinini's *The Couple* 2018, a caravan work in the 2018 exhibition Patricia Piccinini: Curious Affection at GOMA in Brisbane (figure 35). After an overwhelming series of fantastical environments inhabited by her creations, the final darkened room held a caravan with windows lit from inside by a warm welcoming light. Along with each of the few visitors in the room, I was drawn to peer into this 'spatial imaginary'.[45] Although Healy and Cordeiro dismantled a caravan physically for *Wohnwagen* 2006–2007, it was Piccinini's discombobulating insertion of an inhuman yet tender couple into the warmly lit home of our holiday imaginings that shocked and surprised.

[45] Geographers Blunt and Dowling describe home as a 'spatial imaginary' linking ideas and feelings related to context and connected to place (2006, p. 2).

**Figure 35** Patricia Piccinini, *The Couple* (installation view), 2018.

Roberta Staley (2019, n. p.) experienced similar sensations when she came across *The Couple* in a room in the Patricia Hotel in Vancouver for the Vancouver Biennale:

> The shocking appearance of these strangers exacerbated the discomfiting sensation of being a Peeping Tom… The amorous couple, [I was] disconcerted not only by their nakedness, but also by their features: the male inordinately hirsute, his female lover prettily simian. Both possessed long, white, predatory claws on their feet and hands.

Piccinini, however, seems to think much more fondly of the couple, writing:

> I imagine that perhaps these are the only two creatures of their kind, and somehow they have found each other, and escaped. Their location within a caravan or tent or hotel room is very deliberate. A caravan is a space that is almost a house, but temporary – not rooted to one spot. It is domestic but also mobile, compact and cocoon-like.[46]

There was something sweet about the couple I spotted gazing in at *The Couple* at GOMA, seen in silhouette in figure 35. They stood there for some time and after they left I moved in close again and also stood there for a while. My initial shock dissipated and the caravan became a home once more, with a loving couple inside.

[46] http://patriciapiccinini.net/printessay.php?id=113.

*Ian Strange*

When I first came across one of Ian Strange's works in a gallery, I was confused. At first glance it appeared to be a straightforward photograph of a single-storey suburban brick house in shadow, but there was something peculiar about the lighting and it was hard to figure out immediately what was going on (figure 36). I looked him up and discovered an artist who had been painting and cutting into houses, and then photographing or filming the results, since 2011.

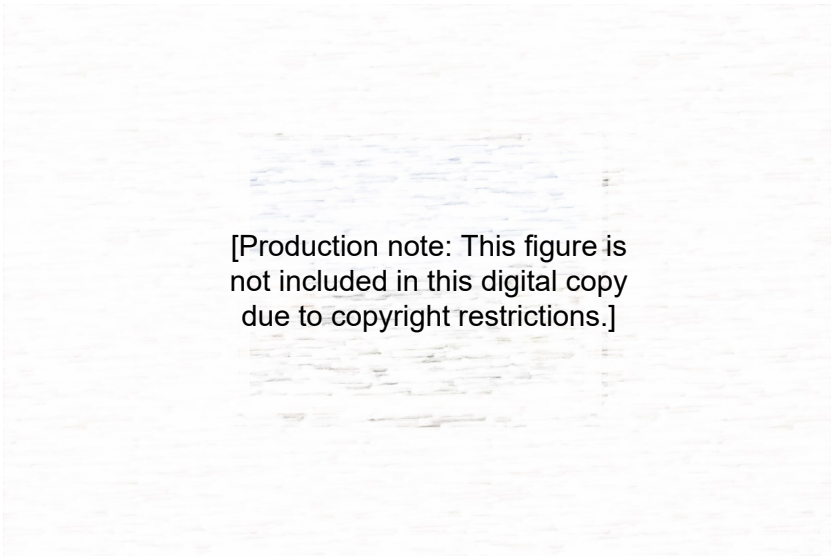


**Figure 36** Ian Strange, *Twenty-four Watkins* (Shadow series), installation view, 2015–2016. Image: © Ian Strange.

Strange is a 'multidisciplinary artist whose work explores architecture, space and home' and the series of artworks he has created by interfering with houses are 'suburban architectural interventions'.[47] The artist goes to great lengths to create dramatic images from his interventions: 'The homes are almost always demolished after the work is executed, so it is the documentation process which gives the work its final form.'[48] So the work, as he sees it, is both the material intervention, which he often achieves with the help of a team of people, including people from the communities he works in, and the works produced through the documentation of the interventions – photographs and videos that are exhibited as installations in galleries.

[47] https://ianstrange.com/biography/.
[48] https://ianstrange.com/works/island-2015-17/text-ii/.

Curator Sarah Corona (2016 n. p.), says 'Many artists have worked on the concept of home but few have used the house as a physical medium'. She lists Strange's rare antecedents Gordon Matta-Clark and Rachel Whiteread,[49] and says:

> Their monumental creations with or on houses have effectively changed the way in which we think about the home as a symbol and stretched our concepts of public art and sculpture. The importance of their work lies not only in the implication of a huge physical effort but also in a new way of documenting it.

It is not clear what Corona means when she says these artworks change the way we think about the home as a symbol and she does not elaborate. If she meant the interventions these artists have made in the fabric of these houses can disturb the way we think about houses as a symbol of home, I agree. If home is a feeling of safety, and it is for me, Strange's cuts into houses and slashes of red paint certainly challenge that feeling, as does Tracey Moffatt's *A Haunting* 2021. For this work Moffatt found an empty farmhouse on the Castlereagh Highway at Armatree, NSW and lit it from within with a pulsing red light that operates every night from 6pm until 6am. Perry, in her chapter on haunted houses, writes that when 'artists appropriate existing houses and transform them into sculptural "artworks", the evocation of literal and metaphorical ghosts can suggest enticing narratives', enabling 'an uncomfortable collision between history, death and domesticity' (p. 143). Indeed Moffatt describes the work variously as a lighted vigil, as like a crime scene, and radiating 'like a dark bloody history that speaks of Colonial settlement and of Indigenous skirmishes with pastoralists'.[50] Driving up at night from the south, the first you see of the house is two distant red 'devil's eyes' (as described by my companion on the journey), only two windows visible from that angle, and as you get closer the whole house appears, pulsing red windows slashed periodically by the headlights of passing trucks. The dramatic impact of this unhomely installation belies the simplicity of the intervention.

Strange's Shadow work is more ambivalent. For Gaston Bachelard, 'The house, even more than the landscape, is a "psychic state", and even when reproduced as it appears

[49] Corona includes Louise Bourgeois and her cell works, but Bourgeois creates her cells and does not use an existing house as material.
[50] https://www.ahaunting.com.au/artist-statement-1.

from the outside, it bespeaks intimacy' (Bachelard 1964/2014, p. 91). And these darkened houses do bespeak a curious kind of intimacy, even though they are hidden in shadow, or perhaps because they are. For Strange it is all about:

> taking a symbol everyone understands and playing with it psychologically… It's the idea of the unhomely, the idea of taking something familiar you think you know well and allowing people to see it differently. It's about making the unfamiliar familiar. (quoted in Omagari 2018)

Corona describes Strange as one of the very few contemporary artists 'whose main medium and preoccupation is the common suburban house'. For Shadow (2013–2015), Strange returned to Western Australia and located five suitable red-brick single-storey suburban houses in Perth and spray painted their entire front matte black. Strange says, 'You read the red brick house as an absurdist object that populates the desert, yet within the context of the rest of suburbia they are not absurd' (quoted in Malyon 2017). To further the shadow effect, the artist also painted parts of the gardens immediately in front of the houses, including the plants. Of these interventions, he says:

> The suburbs have informed so much of Australia's national identity, but seem to undermine a deeper understanding of history and landscape in this country. Shadow is a reaction to that. By painting them black, I wanted to symbolically erase them from the landscape. (quoted in Azzarello 2017)

Shadow was first exhibited as part of the street art Public 2015 Festival in Perth and it is not clear whether the performative element he refers to was part of the work. 'As the viewer inspects the photographs they realise an action has been taken against the house. It is the action of painting the house and an implied element of performance' (Strange quoted in Malyon 2017). Strange appears to have enhanced the shadow effect by backlighting the houses, some more obviously backlit than others. The houses themselves seem subdued, not eliminated so much as cast into darkness, as if something has come between them and the sun in the heart of these otherwise sun-baked suburbs. 'I think about them as negative space,' says Strange (quoted in Malyon 2017), and they do feel empty. They are also very neat and clean. For houses that have been slated for demolition, the gardens are curiously well kept, and photographs of Strange's process

indicate landscaping work being done to align them with the suburban dream. Other process photographs show the imperfections of a rusted gutter and peeling white paint being smoothly overtaken by an even covering of pure black.[51] Britton (n.d.) says:

> The images are monumental and surreal, as strange as, and deeply connected to, our compulsion to plant green manicured lawns on the dry red dirt of West Australia, one of the most extreme climates in the world. In this sense, Strange's work could be read as a sort of poetic warning to the Australian dream.

Strange appears to have got the idea for Shadow after painting a house black as part of an earlier series of works, Suburban (2011–2013), for which the artist, with the help of large film crews, volunteers and communities, performed monumental interventions on eight unwanted houses from Detroit to Alabama to New Hampshire, painting them – one entirely black, one entirely red, another with a giant red cross (figure 37) – and burning two to the ground. He and his crew would repair the houses, dress the gardens, paint the houses and then light, film and photograph them at first and last light:

> I use this documentation process to heighten the emotive content of the work. I want these homes to be considered as the universal home, the imagined and idealised home. The home of memory, TV and childhood. So by using lighting, film crews and this cinematic process, the homes are elevated. These aren't just images of these specific homes in these specific neighbourhoods. They're a reaction to the everyhome that we all understand. (Strange 2018)

Strange means the 'everyhome' that 'we all' who are familiar with suburban Australia, New Zealand and the US (and perhaps more broadly the West) understand, for this is where he has made his work. David Hurlston, curator of Australian art at the National Gallery of Victoria, writes of Suburban: 'Strange's photographs and videos challenge the idea of the family home as a place of warmth and safety by simultaneously elevating and destroying it, both literally and figuratively.'[52]

[51] https://www.designboom.com/art/ian-strange-shadow-australia-suburban-homes-black-03-29-2017/.
[52] https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/ian-strange-suburban/.

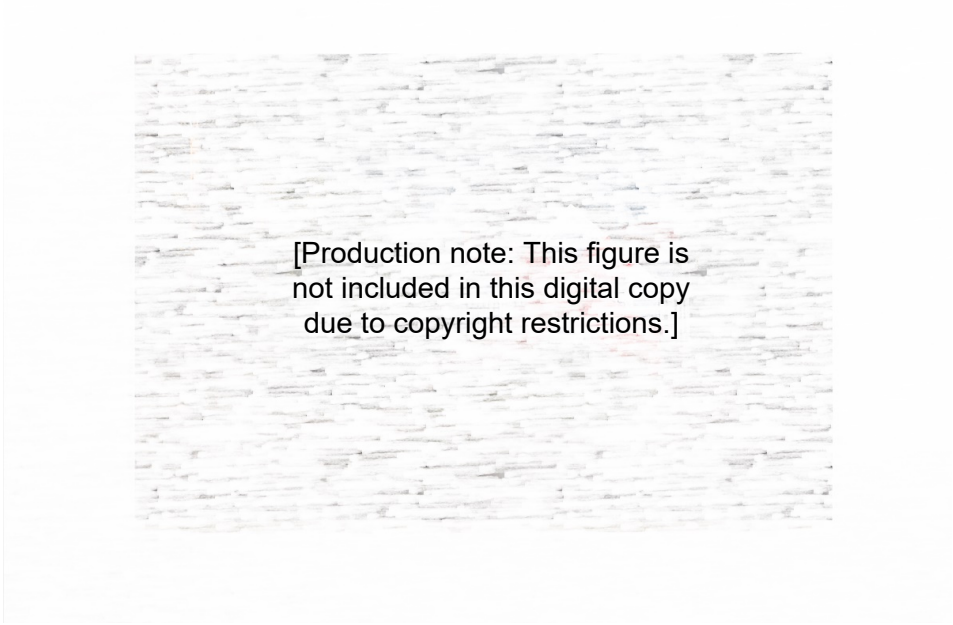


**Figure 37** Installation view, photograph of house from Suburban series. Image: © Ian Strange.

The image of the house marked with the red cross is particularly shocking. The rough, careless splash of the mark, the magnitude of it, the tone of the red, expresses violent erasure. Strange (quoted in Malyon 2017) says, 'For me a marking on a house isn't an act against that specific house, it's an act against the ideas of what the home represents.' Malyon notes the history of marking houses that is echoed in this image full of dread:

> The marking of houses is not new and the artist is quick to point out the historical precedent from doorways during Passover to the condemnations of homes during the bubonic plague. Dwellings have been provocatively inscribed from slanderous graffiti on homes during the Nazi ghettoisation of the Jewish quarter to the pleas for help, more recently, written on the flooded houses during the devastation of hurricane Katrina in the USA. (Malyon 2017)

Comparing Strange's interventions for Suburban to Matta-Clark's *Splitting* (1974), Corona 2016 n. p.) writes, 'Both artists removed through their physical act the debris of habitation from the houses by erasing any quality of home'. For Corona, Strange's work demonstrates 'a completely new way of dealing with the house, with urban architecture and ultimately with the idea of home as a safe and definite place'.

When the 2011 earthquake struck New Zealand, the people of Christchurch discovered that home was, indeed, not a 'safe or definite' place. Complete suburbs in a so-called 'red zone' were declared unsafe, with the houses to be demolished. In 2013, Strange was invited by the Canterbury Museum and a street art festival in Christchurch called RISE to create a work 'that would somehow archive these homes but also act as a dialogue with a community still healing' (Strange 2018). He ended up transforming four of these suburban houses into the artworks that became the basis for Final Act. The gardens were overgrown and the houses boarded up, but because he didn't want to make a work about ruin, he wanted to make a work 'about the memory of these homes' (Strange 2018), he and his helpers cleaned up the gardens and fixed up the houses. He emptied the houses of anything personal that remained, cut out different parts of the walls and roofs, painted the interiors white and shone bright white light out the holes. Strange cut the entire front off one house, leaving the frame intact, cut circles in the exteriors of two houses (figure 38), and for the fourth house cut a horizontal slit in the exterior walls all the way around.


**Figure 38** Ian Strange, *Number Thirty-four* (Final Act), 2013
Archival digital print. Image: © Ian Strange.

Huia Lambie, a not-for-profit worker helping to rebuild the cultural life of the city (quoted in Johnston 2013), says that Strange was honouring the city: 'He's saying these

houses had a soul and a life force. He is creating a legacy of them with their image. He cares about that level of the story, the story of the houses and the land and the people.' Curator Kate Britton (n. d.) also sees the work as a positive force, 'In spite of the vulnerability of these buildings, however, Strange's work cannot but be haunted by optimism. What is more optimistic than building a new community and an art work in a disaster zone?' This feeling may be shared by those who participated in the project, and by the owners of the houses themselves, but engaging with the work from afar through the photographs online that form part of Final Act, what I see is that by cutting these houses and lighting them so starkly from within, Strange emphasises their emptiness, the absence of intimacy, and the fragility of these shells that once held people's lives. If the works are talking about the life force once held within, the light pouring from the holes is its escape. Strange said at the time, 'The humanity inside the homes. Rebirth. This is like the last act of these houses sitting in a hyper reality I have built for them' (quoted in Johnston 2013). At TedX in Sydney in 2018, he says, 'I wanted to open up these homes to reveal their vulnerability and loss of function'. Corona goes further, noting the transformation from home to house to artwork:

> The government's Earthquake Recovery Authority gifted Strange with a series of houses that he stripped of all personal references. He then filled them with white, cold neon light. By illuminating from the inside, he transformed the houses into huge glowing sculptures, emphasizing the structure as fundamental, emotional elements in our lives. (Corona 2016 n. d.).

Strange's Christchurch artworks have a formal connection to the building cuts Gordon Matta-Clark performed between 1971 and 1978 of which the most well-known is *Splitting* (1974), perhaps because of the film Matta-Clark made of the process, although he made photographs of all these works. Both artists made cuts into abandoned buildings, both artists used light to interact with their cuts, and all the works/buildings were ultimately destroyed. However, Matta-Clark did not limit his cutting to homes, he was also drawn to abandoned industrial spaces, and the Christchurch houses were slated for demolition after a natural disaster, rather than societal neglect.

Matta-Clark was a qualified architect who never practised as one, and became a founding member of a loose group of artists calling themselves 'Anarchitecture' and

‘thought of his practice of slicing and cutting up buildings as a critique of a kind’ (Burrows n. d.). ‘In the context of that training, his conceptions of “form,” “surface,” “monumentality,” the “temporary,” and “space” take on a special meaning’ (Vidler 2003). His earliest cuts, *Bronx Floors* (1971–1972), were made into the floors/ceilings in abandoned apartment blocks in the Bronx, ‘New York’s most notoriously neglected borough’, but at around the same time he was experimenting with engaging people in participatory co-produced events ‘from food-giveaways like *Pig Roast* (1971) and *Cuisse de boeuf* (1975) to street performances with dancers like *Open House* (1972) and collective painting projects like *Graffiti Truck* (1973)’ (Richard 2019). In a proposal for a building-cut work in Italy in 1975, he says:

> As an artist, for years I have endeavored to channel my actions toward an idea of social welfare… So, for five years I have worked to the best of my abilities to produce small breaks in the repressive conditions of space generated by the system. In spite of no longer working as an architect I continue to focus my attention on buildings, for these comprise both a miniature cultural evolution and a model of prevailing social structures. Consequently, what I do to buildings is what some do with language and others with groups of people: i.e. I organize them in order to explain and defend the need for change. (1975 Sesto San Giovanni proposal quoted in Richard 2019)

Where Strange’s ‘architectural interventions’ focus on the suburban and home, Matta-Clark is addressing the system. Buildings for Matta-Clark represent ‘a model of prevailing social structures’ and he describes his cuts as ‘opening reaches in walls to give an idea of free passage’ (quoted in Richard 2019). According to art historian Pamela Lee:

> Matta-Clark’s work is a politics of things approaching their social exhaustion and the potential of their reclamation… It is a politics of the art object in relation to property; of the ‘right to the city’ alienated by capital and the state, of the retrieval of lost spaces; of communities reimagined in the wake of their disappearance; a politics of garbage and things thrown away. (quoted in Richard 2019)

Strange doesn’t make broad socio-political claims for his work, but says what he has learned from these projects is that ‘home is not just a static thing, or one thing, it’s not

just an image or an icon, it's also the stories and the communities and the people that they're a part of' (Strange 2018). Suburban, for example, was made 'in the shadow of the GFC' when many homes were being foreclosed and Strange and his crews worked closely with locals so that they were engaged in the projects. And yet the exhibited photographs and video works exclude these communities and give no hint of Strange's local engagement. Unlike the photographs of Matta-Clark's rough building cuts, there is a slickness about most of Strange's exhibited works that stems from the neat, often symmetrical designs of the interventions themselves, the precise lighting and the carefully curated compositions. Process photographs do exist and can be found online in some articles about his work, but these are never exhibited and, as with the work of Matta-Clark, a tiny number of people have experienced Strange's interventions in the flesh compared to the numbers who have seen the photographs and videos/films of them. Strange acknowledges this curious disconnect indirectly when he says: 'Experiencing this work in a gallery as a photograph is very different to the experience of the work in the context of these communities' (Strange 2018). He goes on to say:

> I used to worry about where the final work was in these projects, if it was the documentation, the final photographs, films, sculptures and exhibitions, or if it was the process, the community collaboration and the work when you can stand in front of it in the street, and of course the answer is that it's all of those things. (Strange 2018)

Strange began as a street artist using the name Kid Zoom, and took photographs of his work because in Perth where he grew up graffiti would be painted over within days and his documentation of the work would be all that remained.[53] Early social media such as Myspace opened up a new world of connectivity for him, allowing him to stop just 'competing with the guy down the road' (Strange quoted in Rushmore c.2011) and engage with the broader artworld:

> More and more, distribution of the image is the most important thing. If you're an artist, you're a visual communicator, and if you're communicating visually, you wanna be able to delineate your work as far as you can. To be able to get more eyes

[53] https://viralart.vandalog.com/read/chapter/a-closer-look-at-kid-zoom/.

> seeing it creates more awareness which creates more interest in your work… I think I always make work knowing that it's going online… I think built into creating temporary works where the documentation will continue on is that you know you're making them for an audience who will see those photos. (Strange quoted in Rushmore c.2011)

These comments were made at the time of his first major house work, *Home* (2011), a replica by memory of the house he grew up in, constructed in the Turbine Hall on Cockatoo Island with a giant skull painted on the front and a film documenting his destruction of three Holden Commodores showing inside. He had already moved to New York and was thinking of home (a pop-up solo show he had there in 2010 was called *This City Will Eat Me Alive*), and would soon begin work on the series of physical interventions into suburban homes in the US, Australia and New Zealand that would lead to international recognition.

According to Richard (2019), 'In the decades since his death, Matta-Clark has entered the art-historical canon as a hands-on, shirt-off materialist, a bandana-wearing daredevil vigorously involved with the experience of site'. Replace the bandana with a black baseball cap and you have Ian Strange, hair still Kid Zoom wild as he wields a paint spraygun on a pitched roof without a harness. Matta-Clark's 'labor-intensive yet ultimately ephemeral endeavors resisted commodification in the art market' (Richard 2019). Ian Strange has resisted representation but his documentation work is held in numerous collections, his website has a 'Store' section, and he has successfully constructed a pathway through the artworld from Kid Zoom to TedX to his current position as guest artistic director of the Art Gallery of Western Australia.

This chapter sought to answer an additional research question: When a complete house is abandoned, empty or to be demolished, and all or part of it becomes an artwork, what becomes of home? Taking home as a feeling of safety as much as a place in which we live, the chapter argued that such interventions – in structures still standing but no longer a home and, in the case of Ian Strange's Christchurch works, no longer safe – render these once-lived-in places thoroughly unsafe and unhomely, both psychologically and physically, and that the many such interventions carried out by Strange and artist duo Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro do exactly that. The chapter

discusses their work in the context of the work of key non-Australian predecessors in the to-be-demolished house-as-material field, Gordon Matta-Clark and Rachel Whiteread, and the work of Tony Cragg, an artist who has spent much of his career working with the idea of stacking stuff.

## Conclusion

I began this research asking how contemporary artists in Australia have engaged with the material of lived-in places in their works. More specifically, through an interrogation of my own practice and the practice of others, the research attempted to discover the relationships among site, material and artist practice in the making of such works. The research focused on artists who have exhibited work in, and in response to, actual houses or who have played with the materiality of the house itself in their work, often using houses soon to be demolished, or bits of them, or stuff that has come out of houses.

The research was framed by three concepts in cultural theory and philosophy that can be related to artistic practice in this context. The first was Martin Heidegger's work on dwelling and his argument that dwelling both 'takes on an abode' and takes time. The research argued that the time an artist spends dwelling in a place to make work, particularly through artist residencies, informs the work made in that place. The second concept was Jane Bennett's idea of vibrant matter and her argument for the agency of objects. The research investigated the role a site has in determining the art made in it, arguing that for the artist this involves the dual forces of attention and what I call the power of the peripheral. The third was Gaston Bachelard's proposal that we bring our home, our 'lares' with us, wherever we go. With this in mind, the research introduced what I call an artist's 'toolbox' of practices – ways of working that an artist regularly mobilises.

The research investigated three broad modes of making this kind of site-responsive work: making through dwelling – when an artist spends time dwelling in a place as part of an artist residency or through shorter site visits; making with the artist's own things brought from home; and making with entire houses unoccupied and often slated to be demolished. The research argued that these different ways of working with the materiality of lived-in places produce different relationships among site, materials and artist practice.

Chapter 1 examined what happens in terms of the relationships among site, material and practice when an artist dwells in a place in the process of making a site-responsive

work. Furthermore, it attempted to answer the additional research question 'How do the forces of attention and the power of the peripheral operate in art practices where the artist spends time dwelling in the art-making site?' The chapter argued that everyone with a memory brings their past with them to varying degrees, but for the purposes of this research, the 'home' artists bring to a new house is what I call an artist's toolbox – familiar materials and practices artists bring with them that can inform the work they make in response to a site. The research further argued that the unpredictability of an artist residency, the unfamiliarity of the place, can work to light up unexpected connections in our brains that feed into our making. For the type of dwelling an artist practises when making an artwork in response to a site, the research argued that artists need to take their time. Furthermore, that when artists are able to take their time in an artist residency, the power of the site can greatly influence the work, while urgent site visits mean artists may tend to rely on familiar materials and practices, or research about a place, when making a site-responsive work. The chapter noted that, conversely, artists may spend an extended period of time dwelling in a place and still rely on familiar practices, as in the stacking works of Healy and Cordeiro, and that responses to a site can also come to an artist in a flash. Performance works can sidestep the pressures of the short time available in advance of a project, allowing the artist to use the time spent dwelling *during* the project to work with the site. Finally, the chapter argued that whether a work is made in historic houses filled with objects and their gardens or houses empty or unlived in, the thing power of the site has a strong influence on the work made there.

Chapter 2 attempted to answer the additional research question 'What happens when artists bring their stuff to work?' In other words, what does it mean when artists make work with their own things brought from home? Through an interrogation of my own practice – in particular the Stuff series of works that forms part of the creative component of this research – and the practice of others, this chapter argued that the power of things can be revealed when an artist uses their own belongings in their work. The research argued that this power can lie in a personal object's deep connection to the memory and narrative of our lives, and that the emotions unleashed by these connections can be surprisingly strong. The research argued that a single object can have agency, Jane Bennett's 'thing power' – in this case the power to evoke strong emotions, convey meaning, communicate, connect people – and this is often derived from the story we tell about it, or the memories we hold of similar objects, or simply the

object's physicality. The research argued that when objects are presented en masse, the thing power of the individual objects is magnified by the amount of time the artist must have invested in collecting, the obsessive nature of the selection, the desire to keep all these things. Furthermore, as with the performative works discussed in chapter 1, time also plays a significant role in the creation of these works when the work involves the artist in a performative or storytelling role for the duration of the exhibition or for some part of it.

Chapter 3 discussed artwork made with the fabric of to-be-demolished, empty or abandoned houses where artists take up the opportunity to significantly disturb the structure of a house. The chapter attempted to answer the additional research question 'When a complete house is abandoned, empty or to be demolished and all or part of it becomes an artwork, what becomes of home?' and argued that these creative interventions impact the connection between house and the concept of home in several different ways. Taking home as a feeling of safety as much as place in which we live, the chapter argued that such interventions – in structures still standing but no longer a home and, in the case of Ian Strange's Christchurch works, no longer safe – render these once-lived-in places thoroughly unsafe and unhomely, both psychologically and physically. The safe shelter that these houses once provided has been destroyed and the evidence of that destruction is before the viewer.

The chapter argued that the interventions often feel violent, and this is conveyed through the mighty effort that is implicit in the physical slicing of the houses of Final Act, Ian Strange's Christchurch works that echo Gordon Matta-Clark's well known *Splitting*, or the slashing cross of red paint covering the front of one of the houses in Strange's North American series Suburban. Healy and Cordeiro's careful stacking of a dismantled house for *The Cordial Home Project*, comes across as much less violent, perhaps because of the way the pieces have been meticulously ordered from roof tiles at the top to foundations at the bottom, although it is equally or perhaps more destructive of the feeling of home, crushing as it does any hope of shelter or life within. In contrast, Strange's Christchurch works are still standing, damaged and fragile but crisp and white and lit from within to create beams of light through the gaping holes that are either a beacon of hope or the last remnants of home dissipating in the night sky.

The research argued that some of the artworks considered disturb the concept of home through disorientating the viewer physically and psychologically, for example, Strange's *Shadow* series of houses with their entire front, and parts of their gardens, spray painted black. Leaving us uneasy and uncertain about what exactly we are looking at, the houses remain but the shadows cast across them disturb the perception we might have had of them as safe and happy homes. Other examples include Healy and Cordeiro's *Not Under My Roof*, which sliced the floor out of an empty farmhouse and placed it on a gallery wall, confounding our reading of it, and Patricia Piccinini's *The Couple* in the caravan, disturbing the safety zone of the gallery and our expectations of what this homely contraption might contain.

This new knowledge will help art historians and artists themselves better understand this type of responsive art practice and how the influence of site, materials and artist practice interact when artists are making a work with the material of lived-in places. For example, the research indicates that exposure to the unfamiliar can boost the generation of ideas. This research also gives curators and those who commission artists an insight into how artists engage with site and material, especially in relation to lived-in places, which will be able to guide how they curate and commission work.

Organisations that run residencies often require specific and detailed proposals, which take time to write and time to consider. This research finds that the influence of the site on the work through the time spent dwelling in the place indicates that specific proposals for residencies may be a waste of time. A better method – already employed by some organisations, such as The Mattress Factory in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania – is to simply ask for documentation of previous practice, including websites/socials, trusting the artist to create work of the expected standard.

Finally, while artists may reflect on their site-responsive practice, it is hard to find documentation of these reflections. Genevieve Lacey's in-depth reflection on the making of *Pleasure Garden*, mentioned previously, is a rarity and although it is very detailed, it does not frame her process in terms of the influence of site, material and practice. This indicates a useful direction for future research: in-depth interviews with artists about how their process for individual site-responsive artworks accommodates the competing influences of site, material and their artist practice.

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