



'Ziggurat', 2014, multi-media installation, water, ash, cinders, feathers and laundry lint, 150 x 200 x 30 cm. Articulate Project Space, Sydney



'Spiral Garden', 2014, grevillea root, cedar, Japanese clay figures, mdf, 32 x 45 x 18 cm. William Wright Artist Projects

ANNE GRAHAM: MNEMONIC OBJECTS

VISITING Anne Graham's studio several years ago was akin to a child visiting a lolly shop – eye's darting everywhere, settling on one object only long enough to be enticed by another. Etched in my memory were boxes of combs, fossils, horsehair, gatherings of wood and wax, shells, pins and needles, all of which I likened at the time to a Foucauldian community of monsters.¹ These objects pop up now and again in various artworks, and while some may find themselves permanently fixed to a particular work, others go back into the repository of things for a future incarnation. This gathering of life's minutiae and detritus, from lint, coal, dust, dog hair and bowls to feathers and Japanese stools, all reflect Graham's interest in the way that ordinary things are imbued with meaning.² The observations of Susan Pearce's on the compulsion of collecting acknowledges that the peculiar qualities of objects open



'Emiko, Megumi and Jesse', 2014, wearing coats made from Jesse's fur

up the possibility of forming relationships with the distant or recent past, and in doing so gain some sense of continuity.³ The objects themselves have been collected over several decades from

travels around the world or from Graham's own backyard, hearth or the local laundrette. She also has an uncanny ability to persuade unsuspecting victims, including her curator husband Anthony Bond, to participate in her folly and this is how some of the works in two recent exhibitions in Sydney came to be. The first show was held at William Wright Artist Projects and the second, "Singing Sands and Falling Trees" was held at the Articulate Project Space.

Both exhibitions contained works made from either found objects – a distinctly Duchampian trait – or those made from temporal materials such as felt composed of dog hair or pieces of discarded wood and metal, reflecting Graham's deep interest in the work of Joseph Beuys.⁴ Beuys believed that materials such as copper, felt and fat could generate restorative energy.

In the upper gallery at William

Wright Artists Projects, Graham installed a number of works from a series she has been working on which involved several friends and their canine companions. Over a period of time two artists, a curator, a writer/designer couple and other friends collected the hair discarded by their dogs. Through the ancient process of felting, Graham mixed the dog hair with merino wool to produce large sections of felt which were then cut and sewn to make coats, hats or scarves for the pet owners. The size of the resulting garments depended on how much hair was collected. In the exhibition the garments were hung on the wall alongside a large photograph of the subjects clad in the felt costumes, accompanied by their beloved canines. The tactility of the felt was enhanced by the subjects who, in wearing the garments were in the process of becoming "dog", swathed in the fur of their pets who not unexpectedly resemble their owner.

The objects shown in both exhibitions are highly enigmatic, tactile and mnemonically charged – one work bares the trace of a cooked fish in Japan, another recalls the singing sands of a long lost Japanese beach, and yet another, the wings of currawongs or whirling dervishes. These objects evoke memory-images, fluid as in a fictive narrative or a "contaminated memory" as Graham puts it, and yet they are rooted in the mere objectness of the thing before us. This process recalls the writing of WG Sebald, whose inconsistencies between his meandering writings and the photographic images he includes to give veracity to the text, form layers of meaning that are shaped in part by both Sebald and the reader. Graham's works, like Sebald's texts, are from the position of being the outsider or the observer who, like the character in

'Julie and Cloud', 2014, wearing the felt coat made from Cloud's fur
'Eugenia and Atom', 2014, wearing the felt coat made from Atom's fur



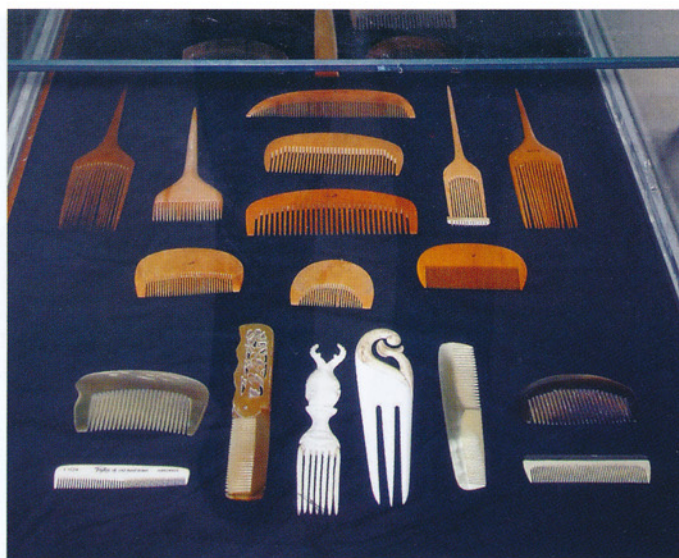
The Rings of Saturn, collects experiences and stories which become merged into new forms.⁵

Several of the works in both shows fall into this category – such as those works resembling Japanese fans made from cedar salvaged from an industrial cooling tower that were combined with copper, aluminium or Perspex shelves. On the various shelves were living organisms such as a grevillea root or miniature native orchids. These objects become contemplative and meditative spaces where something new is formed from often seemingly conflicting materials.

This is true also of the sculptural installation *Ziggurat*, which is reminiscent of a shrine, consisting of a number of Japanese stools piled on top of each other and various glass and wooden vitrines. On the central stool at the top of *Ziggurat* is a bottle containing water from the Cox's River in the Blue Mountains and on each side are vitrines containing bird feathers, lint from the Lithgow laundry and cinders from Graham's fireplace. Placed on the remaining stools are brass bowls with ash from her hearth. All of these objects have a visceral connection to the artist and to her sense of place, whether in a local or global sense. This sense of place stems very much from mnemonic connections to objects but also from Graham's ability to situate herself in a place through various artist residencies that build up an archive of memories, stories and things which she can draw upon to make her art.

The story of the lint from the Lithgow laundry provides a narrative that draws on Graham's wit and her interest in detritus. On chatting to the laundry owner "Mrs Washalot" (as she calls herself), Graham became intrigued with the role of the laundry as the place where local workers and miners have their uniforms washed, and she requested the lint be collected for a possible project. What resulted were sheets of fibrous lint that contain layers of various colours and textures from the uniforms plus the coal dust, hair, and other fibres pressed into rivers of patterns. These sheets of lint, like the dog-hair felt, contain traces of various lives all interwoven into the textiles presenting a tension between their corporeal forms and incorporeal qualities. In the exhibition these textiles are somewhat severed from their associations and 'reside as treasures in the sober rooms of our later insights – like torsos in a collector's gallery', as Walter Benjamin puts it.⁶ Benjamin likens memory to an

'*Singing Sands*', 2012. Niigata Land and Water Festival, Japan
'*Singing Sands*', 2014. Articulate Project Space, Sydney



Collection of Japanese combs in the artist's studio, 2014

archaeological report in which the subject digs through the layers of strata to locate traces of the past.

The installation *Singing Sands* is a reconstruction of a piece she made in 2012 for the Niigata Water and Land Art Festival in Japan. Like Benjamin's archaeologist, the work located the connection between Shinohara Kozaburo's house in the village of Gokahama, which had been moved from Kakumihama, a small village that had disappeared owing to erosion and was famed for its singing sand. In making the piece as a site-specific installation inside the house, Graham reunited the building with its former location through the memory of the singing sand. The "singing" sound is produced by friction when the grains press against each other in movement like when a foot presses on the dry sand or, in Graham's work, when the glass beads and carborundum funnel through the centre of the glass and bronze



'*Jonie, Miriam and Scout*', 2014, wearing a suit made from his dog Francis Bacon's fur in front of his Dog House in Tokyo. The neons designed by Joseph Kosuth

columns. *Singing Sand* keeps the memory of the former village alive but also brings with it other related stories that blogger Noi Sawaragi discusses in relation to Graham's exhibition in Gokahama. The villages of Niigata and Kakumihama are linked, not just through the relocation of Shinohara's house, but also through the legacy of nuclear warfare. According to Sawaragi, Niigata was identified as a potential atomic target at the end of World War II, fortunately averted due to bad weather. In 1969 it was proposed that a nuclear plant be built on the remaining site of Kakumihama, which thankfully never went ahead given its unstable foreshore. Graham's new iteration of *Singing Sands* in Sydney keeps these connections fresh and creates new relationships between her mnemonic objects and us in her memories of them.

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NOTES

1. See catalogue essay, Anne Graham: *The Alchemy of becoming*, Sherman Contemporary Art Gallery, Sydney, 2003 and Michel Foucault, *The order of things* 1966.
2. See Janet McKenzie, Anne Graham interview: 'The ability to see things as if for the first time is for me the essential quality necessary to make art', *Studio International*, 1 October 2014.
3. Susan Pearce, *On collecting: an investigation into collecting in the European tradition*, Routledge, Oxon, 1995, 250.
4. Marcel Duchamp, 1887–1968 and Joseph Beuys, 1921–1986.
5. WG Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, Michael Hulse trans. The Harvill Press, London, 1998.
6. Walter Benjamin, *Excavation and Memory*, c.1932, Rodney Livingstone trans. in Michael W Jennings et al, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol 2, part 2, 1931–1934, Belknap Press, Harvard University Press, MA, 1999.

