

**Fixing the
Unbroken:
New making
on the vessel**



David Clarke, 2014.

DAVID CLARKE (UK)
PETER BAUHUIS (GER)
VITO BILA (AUS)

I remember aged nine or ten my mother would occasionally lay out all the silverware on the dining room table. A bundle of rags, a tin of Silvo, my job was to clean them as part of the weekly pursuit of pocket money. For a job, cleaning the silver occurred rarely enough to offer some appeal, the satisfying system of applying the milky Silvo with one cloth and rubbing it off with another to reveal a gleaming surface underneath could be quite thrilling.

The objects of the cleaning were a mystery though. Vessels of different sorts – jugs, bowls and candlestick holders, never used, and slowly tarnishing decoratively on side tables in our lounge and dining room, or out of sight in cupboards along with the silver cutlery set used once or twice a year at Christmas and Easter. The material quality of the silver definitely met a nine-year-old's criteria for specialness but as 'things' they were fussy, not to be touched (finger marks sped up the blackening) and ultimately useless.

Opening packages and crates at Objectspace in early January, arriving from Christchurch, Melbourne and Germany, and the first thing I thought of was the my mother's table laid out with an assemblage of silverware ready for cleaning. This time though, and to what would have then been my complete delight, the objects had undergone some kind of alchemic, rock n roll treatment. Distorted and dismembered vessels, bowls, jugs and dishes only half there, bearing amputations and mutant grafting's appeared in the unpacking. With surfaces that show the force and heat and energy of their making, producing unholy unions between seemingly incompatible elements that render tarnish marks and imperfections entirely irrelevant.

The artists work assembling at Objectspace, David Clarke (UK), Vito Bila (Australia) and Peter Bauhuis (Germany), for *Fixing the Unbroken: New making on the vessel* could be categorised by their shared disruptive power. Anti-authoritarian, funny and also masterful. The artists share a view of metal that seems to simultaneously acknowledge the ancient legacy of where their work has come from while embracing the new and the untested. In a Venn diagram of artist's genres they each might share a circumference line with the age-old practices of metalwork and silversmithing, but also conceptual art and contemporary jewellery.

The works express a particular kind of magic not for what is disguised or made to disappear in the process of their



Vito Bila, 2014.

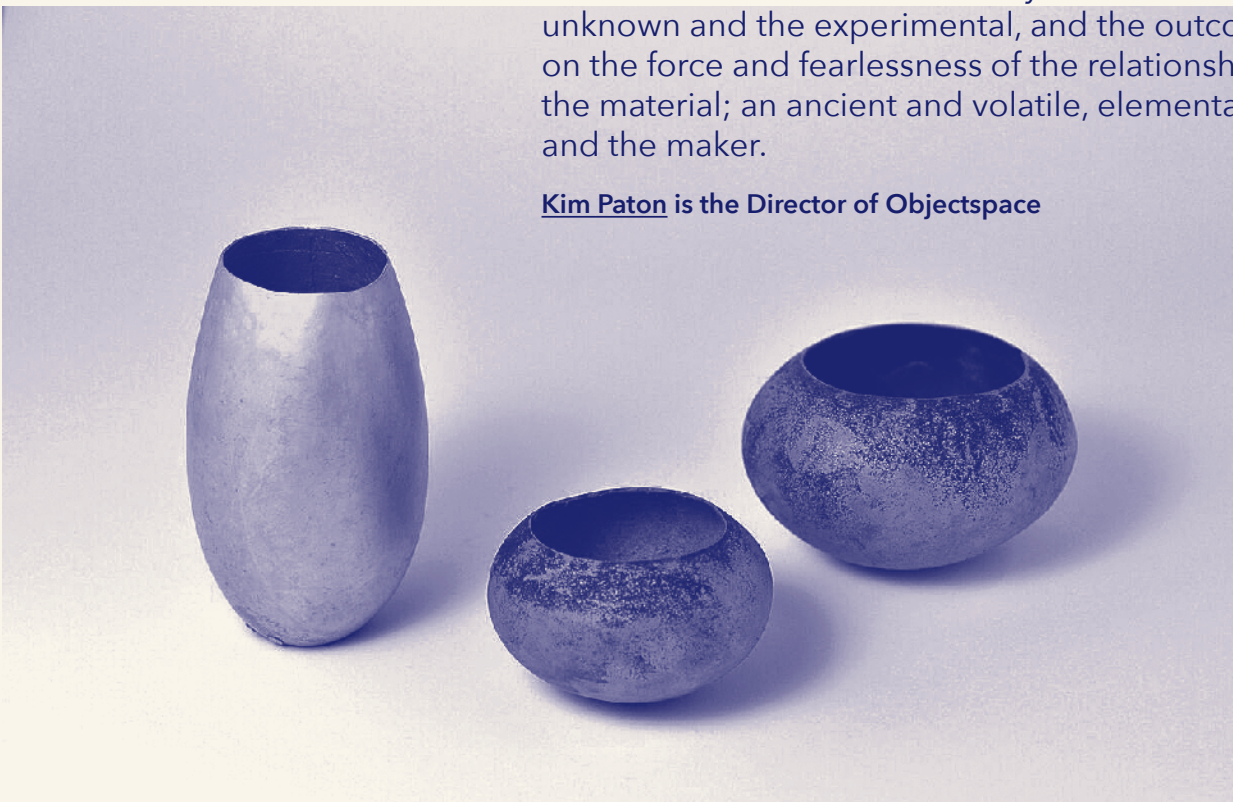


making, but by what is made abundantly clear. The cast, join, fix, seam, weld. Marks made by the hand or the hammer, or the extraordinary heat with which the liquid metal is cast. All of these things become markers and signposts; they speak of the process of the maker and the organic matter of which they are made. Clarke cuts, collages and remaster's jugs, vessels and spoons, taking domestic silverware so utterly recognisable for its expected form and function (sideboards, mantelpieces, stuffy Sunday lunches) and renders them new as caricatures of their former selves, funny and full of life. If you cup one of Peter Bauhuis's small vessels in your hands it feels surprisingly weighty for its eggshell thin form. Silver, gold, deep blacks, rose and red, the surface of the works bear the marks of natural elements (zinc, gold, silver, copper, nickel, bronze) mixing and colliding, the results of this compulsion appear very old and very new. Bila too encourages the oxides and archaic colouring which occur in the casting process to remain on the surface of his work, he makes a feature of the join and a decoration of the weld, and like Clarke he effortlessly adds at the same time as he takes away, objects are given height, or gutted of their internal structure, contrasting metals sit side by side.

The exhibition collaboration between Bila, Clarke and Bauhuis began as part of Radiant Pavilion in Melbourne in 2015, and with The National, Christchurch, Objectspace brings it to New Zealand in an expanded form, the result is an international survey of contemporary silversmith practice arguably at the margins – the leading edges, where work is made in the murky conditions of the unknown and the experimental, and the outcome relies on the force and fearlessness of the relationship between the material; an ancient and volatile, elemental thing; and the maker.

Kim Paton is the Director of Objectspace

Peter Bauhuis, 2015.



The Group: home-wares

JULIA HOLDERNESS



To Be of Use

“Most of my fantasies are of, to be of use, to be of some hard, simple, undeniable use, like a spindle, like a candle, like a horseshoe, like a corkscrew – to be of use”¹.

The Group: home-wares is an installation with multiple facets, not only does it highlight the skewed and shifting way in which we assess and depict the past, it poses a feminist stance that is echoed through an existing inequality between fine and applied arts. The installation brings to the fore the much contested segregation of the arts; into those that are *of use*; defined as the applied arts, and fine art; defined as art which has no use other than to generate higher thought or to find its success within merits of beauty. In an age of mass production and 3D printers where the world is full to the brim with things, contemporary practices are shifting and said definitions are becoming more fluid.

The Group was a collective of artists who staged annual exhibitions in Christchurch from 1927 to 1977, including contributions from Rita Angus, Colin McCahon and Louise Henderson. Whilst researching the Group's exhibition catalogues over that period, Artist Julia Holderness noticed the marginalisation of pottery and weaving through their placement within the catalogue back pages.

The Group: home-wares is a fictitious re-staging of an exhibition by the collective. It is a collection of pieces sourced both from the imagination, and from the descriptive listings in The Group catalogues such as 'branch pot' and 'wall hanging'. It is an interpretation of the real, and the imagined, including diverse visual archive references alongside remakes of actual Bauhaus artworks and products. This counter memory proposes that Florence Weir created connections between the work of the Group, the Bauhaus (1919-1933) and Omega workshops (1913-1919). Weir is an imagined member of the Group, an artist persona created through a collaboration between Holderness and Richard Orjis that saw them create a ceramic range in her name last year. Florence is a symbol of, and homage to the strong women artists that were working as part of The Group. Weir continues to work and create outside of the collaboration that created her.



These fictitious re-presentations of history call into question our interpretation of the past through archives; what has been documented, whose voice/view creates an archive? When delving into the catalogues of the Group exhibitions some forty years later the lens by which the archive is being looked at has shifted through time. Holderness has manipulated details of the past to create her own *history* one that is possibly less *his* and more *story*. The presentation proposes an alternative reading and remembering as Merewether suggests “intervention in the archive... (is) a gesture of alternative knowledge or counter-memory which can harbour the possibility of an unexpected utopian dimension”.²

The Group: home-wares points to the division between art forms by posing a group exhibition exclusively showcasing items for a domestic environment including pottery, textiles and prints. Referencing a shift in the placement of applied arts, *The Group: home-wares* seemingly creates a discourse around art that has a purpose. The work of artist Isobel Thom comes to mind, as an exemplar of the many artists who are creating ceramic work that would have, in the past, been framed as applied art but are read within a contemporary context of fine art. On an international stage, the 2015

1
Callahan, B. (1997). To be of Use (Recorded by Smog). *Red Apple Falls*. Chicago: Drag City.

2
Merewether, Charles. "Art and the Archive" in *The Archive: Documents of Contemporary Art*, edited by Merewether, Charles, (London & Cambridge: co-published by Whitechapel and The MIT Press, 2006), 14.

3
3. Turner Prize surprise (2015, December, 8). *CNN*. Retrieved from <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/12/08/arts/turner-prize-2015-award-winners-assemble/index.html>

4
Lees-Maffei Grace., Sandino, Linda. (2004). Dangerous Liaisons, Relationships Between Design, Craft and Art. *Journal of Design History*, 17(3), 207.

winners of the Turner Prize provide a poignant example of the increasing overlap between design and art practices. *Assemblage*, a collective of six architects who worked alongside residents to create "a low-cost model of grassroots regeneration, using found materials to produce interior fittings... that have so far been used to refurbish 10 derelict properties."³

The distinctions between applied art and fine art become blurred to a point of redundancy within contemporary arts practices, giving greater weight to the context and framing of work. "design, craft and art can be seen to occupy an unstable territory of permanently shifting allegiances, and this is true of both histories of these three sets of practices and the three families of discourses surrounding them"⁴ However definitions and distinctions of a project or artwork's use and real-world affect become increasingly important. Through her installation Holderness has created a new reality, one that hints at a proposed applied/fine art utopia, where objects of beauty and use have leveled a playing field for higher thought and consideration.

A.D Schierning is from Piarere in South Waikato and currently resides in Auckland. She graduated from Elam, University of Auckland, in 1999 with a BFA and in 2009 with a Post Graduate Diploma in Fine Arts.

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Objectspace

Objectspace
8 Ponsonby Rd
Auckland
New Zealand

09 376 6216
Mon to Sat 10 to 5
info@objectspace.org.nz
www.objectspace.org.nz

 creative.nz
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