

Education Resource

Crystal Palace

Flinders University City Gallery

27 July - 29 September 2013

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This education resource is suitable for senior secondary students and undergraduate tertiary students.

Please refer to the exhibition catalogue for further reading.



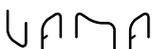
Flinders University
Art Museum &
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AUGUST 2-25 2013



UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUMS AUSTRALIA

Flinders University City Gallery
State Library of South Australia
North Tce, Adelaide SA 5000

Gallery hours
Tue-Fri 11-4, Sat & Sun 12-4

www.flinders.edu.au/artmuseum

Introduction

Crystal Palace at Flinders University City Gallery is a response to the original Crystal Palace and *The Great Exhibition* that it housed in London in 1851. The Crystal Palace was an enormous glass pavilion, an engineering marvel, built using the latest technology in iron and glass building techniques. The Crystal Palace and its displays have been romanticised in popular imagination and, more recently, analysed from a critical, post-colonial perspective. The latter discussion focuses on the exploitation implicit in the display of exotic and foreign objects collected from the colonies alongside technological innovations of the Industrial age.

In *Crystal Palace* guest curator, Lisa Harms, calls artists to respond to the post-colonial assessments of *The Great Exhibition* of 1851, and of the process of collecting more generally. Harms and selected artists, Morgan Allender, Troy-Anthony Baylis, Domenico de Clario, Siamak Fallah, Lisa Gorton, Julie Henderson, Brigid Noone, Lee Salomone, and Sera Waters, began by engaging with the Flinders University Art Museum (FUAM) collection of artworks and objects. The brief was expanded to include objects 'collected' from other public archives – Ernabella Arts Archive; South Australian Museum; Santos Museum of Economic Botany, Botanic Gardens of Adelaide; and the Flinders University Library Special Collections and School of Humanities collection. Research was also conducted into items held by the State Library of South Australia. The selected works are connected by their origins in, or reference to, the colonial period. The artists, through their engagement with the collected works, offer alternative versions of Australia's colonial history and ideas of home, belonging and displacement.

The art works, new and old, in *Crystal Palace*, are displayed together in a gallery transformed into a temporary cabinet of curiosities. This reflects changing ideas of collecting and display and examines the appropriation of artistic and cultural imagery. In *Crystal Palace* Harms and the commissioned artists, in collaboration with FUAM, disrupt and reassess colonial ideas of conquest and collecting.

Questions

1. Investigate the original Crystal Palace and *The Great Exhibition* in London in 1851. Research the design and construction of the Crystal Palace and discuss the developments in technology that led to this design. Did similar structures exist elsewhere in Europe or elsewhere in the British Empire, in Australia, for example? What happened to the Crystal Palace after the closure of *The Great Exhibition*?
2. How does Lisa Harms, guest curator of *Crystal Palace*, re-examine the nature of collections? Can you provide other examples of curators 'mining museums,' and discuss why you think this is an important development in contemporary curatorial practice?
3. Morgan Allender's large-format painting *Meridian* (2013) in *Crystal Palace* is made in part in response to a set of untitled paintings by Audrey and Lucky Kngwarreye (1995). Discuss the influence of the Indigenous works on Allender's own. Investigate the history of painting in the Utopia community, north-east of Alice Springs, and explore how meaning is embodied in the motifs of the works.
4. Examine the traditional modes of collection and display of Aboriginal and Torres Strait artefacts in Australian museums. How do these compare to the ideas that shape Troy-Anthony Baylis' work in *Crystal Palace*? How does this contemporary framework alter the way we perceive the works from the collection on display in *Crystal Palace*? Do you think this approach would work for other collections?
5. Discuss the ways in which Domenico de Clario's work examines notions of home and belonging on the one hand, and oppression and power on the other. Examine the ways in which these notions may also have been important to Albert Namatjira.
6. Traditional collections are about classification, knowledge and ownership. Compare and contrast Siamak Fallah's work in *Crystal Palace* with traditional techniques for the collection and display of artefacts. What conclusions can be drawn from Fallah's response to, and interaction with, the collections?

7. Lisa Gorton hopes, through her poem written for *Crystal Palace*, to evoke a virtual palace that exists only in the minds of gallery goers. In doing so she examines the legacy of the historical Crystal Palace. Research the processes through which *The Great Exhibition* in 1851 defined colonialism and the expansion of the British Empire. Further research may focus on the representation of Australia within the exhibition. Find examples of contemporary collections and displays that show the traditions of *The Great Exhibition* are a continuing influence.
8. In your own words, explain what you think Julie Henderson means when she says she “activates objects”? How does this process manifest in her work in *Crystal Palace*? Discuss how this practice could be a useful strategy through which to reassess the motivation behind traditional collections.
9. Brigid Noone’s wall painting *Exotic sorrows* (2013) is a response to the painting, ‘*The Empress Eugénie Surrounded by her Ladies in Waiting* (1855) by Franz Xaver Winterhalter (Germany, 1805–1875). In reactivating this colonial style work she examines themes of gender and the Other in the colonial era. Conduct further research to ascertain the position of women in colonial society. Discuss how Winterhalter’s image both exoticises women and depicts them as Other.
10. Discuss what you think objects and their histories mean to Lee Salomone. How does the juxtaposition of objects, or their recontextualisation, alter their meaning? What does Salomone’s personal collection tell you about his experience as an Australian with Italian heritage?
11. Comment on the way Sera Waters examines history in her work. How do you see the notion of time, and its effects, explored in her work? Explain how you would depict your own personal or family history in an artwork.

Morgan Allender

Morgan Allender's painting practice has developed as an interpretive response to traditional European still life genres, within a 21st century Australian context, referencing flower-themed art by female artists and craftspeople. In recent years her work has dealt with themes of colonialism, plant-hunting expeditions, and the environmental issues surrounding the introduction of plant species to Australia. More recently Allender's paintings take elements of 17th century still life – roses, peonies and fabric drapery – pushed toward abstraction through a filter of mid-century photography.

Her large-format painting *Meridian* (2013) presents a response to specific works from the Flinders University Art Museum collection, undertaken in parallel to these recent explorations. Allender has responded to a pair of Joseph Nash prints, dated 1852, depicting scenes from the original Crystal Palace – with oversized Persian rugs hanging, one after the other, along the galleria – and a set of untitled paintings, dated 1995, by Alyawarre artists Audrey and Lucky Kngwarreye which depict highly coloured plant-like or floral forms composed in a symmetrical pattern. *Meridian* draws influence from the patterning and symmetry in these paintings, and similarly from the rugs of Middle Eastern origin shown in the Nash prints, and consequently acts as a meditation on the formal similarities between the two. *Meridian* hangs loosely along a wall, hovering suspended; its raw edges teased out and encouraged to slightly unravel, drawing influence from the fringed edge of hanging Persian rugs and weavings. Numerous oversized English rose and flower forms are scattered across a horizontal axis that divides the painting into two nearly symmetrical, mirrored, halves. Slight differences in the colours and shapes of each half figure a response to the 'imperfections' often deliberately woven into the designs of Middle Eastern rugs. An area of foliage patterning, or stem, winds along the central axis echoing the two paintings by Audrey and Lucky Kngwarreye.

Troy-Anthony Baylis

Troy-Anthony Baylis' work follows the possibility that not all examples of historical Aboriginal artefacts were collected by museums, and further, questions the aspects of culture that may be forgotten by not being represented within 'authorised' collections. They are installed 'in conversation' with Flinders University Art Museum collection works: three by Albert Namatjira – exquisite paintings on polished wooden coat-hangers – and several by Ernabella artists: a hand-hooked rug and a group of works on paper made by schoolchildren including one by Pitjantjatjara artist Nyukana (Daisy) Baker, the most celebrated of Ernabella artists, who went on to create artworks in printmaking, weaving, batik and ceramics. Her use of bright, sometimes fluorescent colourations, and simple patterns that can be simultaneously read as 'any old thing,' or as design, can also be read, Baylis suggests, as an *authentic* representation of culture.

Baylis' three sets of 'modesty plates': sewn, woven, and knitted from acrylic wool and grass are displayed – as ambiguous, 'alter/native' artefacts – within a Victorian display cabinet beneath a brass rod holding the Namatjira coat-hangers – domestic, iconic – aloft. Each set of 'modesty plates' consists of a 'bra and knickers', non-gender specific, one-size-fits-all, wearable objects. The colour variations and patterns of the material and its weave have a 'look-a-likeness,' calling to Baker's work. One large knitted sculpture, shaped like a tree trunk with two narrow branches extending out, without outer foliage – makes reference to 'Kaboobie', one of Baylis' 'performing bodies', a drag queen, with lithe and flailing limbs, who may be waving fancifully back into her Jawoyn creation prehistory to Mimi spirits, mimicking their elongated bodies and embodying their trickster antics.

Domenico de Clario

Domenico de Clario responds to two works by Western Arrernte artist Albert Namatjira: *Mount Sonder* (1952), a watercolour depicting two magnificent ghost gums, similar to those vandalised in early 2013, and a pokerwork plaque (c1932), fashioned from a cross-section of a mulga tree, emblazoned with the words 'Other refuge have I none'.

These serve as the still point around which four performances revolve – recorded while de Clario undertook a camping residency at Flinders University campus – a series of refrains offering doubled homage to Namatjira and to certain (un-settled) notions of home. At each performance two songs were sung slowly and softly in Italian, using a spinet from the University's School of Humanities (the familiar rendered strange – in combination, in context and in translation). Both songs describe resistance to oppression and invasion: Andrew Barton "Banjo" Paterson's *Waltzing Matilda* (1895) and the partisan rallying cry *Bella Ciao* (c1906), popularised in Italy during the war years 1943 – 1945.

Video recordings of the residency performances are projected (in close relationship with Namatjira's works) against de Clario's monochrome painting, *yellow ectoplasm: ghost gums and ranges, central australia 1958 (for a.n.)*, made in 2003 as part of a series homaging deceased Australian artists. A story describing his first encounter with a watercolour by Albert Namatjira is printed in simple type on an A4 sheet and displayed nearby. It tells how, in 1957, whilst enrolling in a Melbourne primary school soon after arriving from Italy as a migrant, he and his mother came across a reproduction of a watercolour by Namatjira. She mistakenly believed that the creator of this quintessentially Australian image was Italian (his name misspelled). Their joint impression was that this was a joyful image – and that the light and colour emanating from the space inside the painting imparted an unexpected spiritual dimension. This new work prompts an experiential questioning of the tensions, doubts and longings embedded in contemporary culture as a residue of the colonial presence.

Siamak Fallah

In Crystal Palace Siamak Fallah presents performed and installed works within and around a constructed 'room' in the gallery, which he has furnished with items from the Flinders University Library Special Collection: a desk, writing compendium, chair, clock...a framed image of a ship at sea, and a pair of delicate green-tinted vases, each holding a withering strand of foliage. He figures his presence – his activity, his work – as liquid crystal, narrating himself with-in, and from, the collection, slowly unfolding: crystallizing in this collective project. Pressed specimens documented from an ongoing work-in-progress titled, *Az Zabán-i Mádari: Kitáb-i Ishq (From the Mother Tongue: Book of Love)* (2009–), his own collection, are also displayed.

Fallah's installation/performance examines the fear and joy that accompany the desire to both connect with and control the natural world, articulating the cultural paradox of collecting: whereby knowledge is generated by artificially isolating 'things' from their environment. For Fallah, the act of collection is both inspired by the glorious beauty of the natural world, and the simultaneous anxiety about being within it; certain aspects are selected, framed, to minimise this anxiety, at times he feels, with devastating consequences. A wall drawing generated from tracings of maps and botanical illustrations, from Matthew Flinders' *A Voyage to Terra Australis*, published in London in 1814, forms part of his performance. A pair of videos: a 'stereovision' capsized, confused, contrariwise, chaotic and inverted – in which Fallah has documented his visit to the Museum of Economic Botany – allegorises the way in which the environment is viewed through his own, and other, acts of collecting. The idea of nature governed by determined laws from which it does not depart – composition and decomposition, or life and death – is explored through this process of a slowly crystallizing attitude embodied as an artwork, which includes his own presence, and is titled as a whole *Rú'eedan-i Ishq (Growing Love)* (2013).

Lisa Gorton

Lisa Gorton's work comprises a spoken poem in three parts: an audio-tour of the Crystal Palace as it was in 1851, unfolding a fabulous imaginary building within the exhibition's narrow walls and confined spaces. The poem draws on lithographs by Joseph Nash from the series *The Great Industrial Exhibition of 1851* (1852) and the Crystal Palace auction document held by the State Library of South Australia. The poem offers a meditation on how the past haunts the present; suggesting the ways in which empire-building has shaped how we approach and present artefacts.

Each of the poem's parts plays through a set of headphones on repeat. The headphones have long cords, allowing the visitor to advance, bringing a dreamlike intimacy to the work. The headphones are tethered to three different areas: points that exaggerate the contrast between the present exhibition's confined spaces and the vast imaginary spaces of the original Crystal Palace. The poem's first part, which guides the visitor towards the entrance of the Crystal Palace, sounds as the visitor first enters the narrow passageway. The poem's second part, which describes a vast and crowded hall, and glass fountain, sounds as the visitor stands in the central space by a blank column. The poem's last part, which traps the visitor in the Crystal Palace, sounds as the visitor heads towards the exit, or towards a partially blocked-off passageway. Because the original Crystal Palace described in the poem has vanished, the poem reflects the tensions built into this exhibition: between those objects that survive us, and our dreams of possession; between empire-building, and our close experience of the world. It also suggests the way consumption has overtaken dreams and longings; it shows the work of empire-building itself as a wild extension of the private desire to overtake, collect and own the world.

Julie Henderson

Julie Henderson's practice is interdisciplinary – an 'ecology' of spatial practices – investigating relations between the physical world and the people/bodies moving – and moved – within it. Henderson has responded not to any particular artefact in the collections, but rather, to the idea that an archive/collection can be activated in order to consider the limits, values and choices of another time so as to enable a perspective on the present. This, she suggests, applies to an art archive or collection that potentially deactivates and delineates those works. In a sense then, her work is an antidote for such processes and, like a kind of archaeology, it allows the archive to become functional and active.

In *Crystal Palace* Henderson's works refer to the architectural containment of past collections in the original Crystal Palace, and cites the auction document that details the structure's functioning through a basic kind of atmosphere or air-conditioning. Ventilation of the original Crystal Palace occurred through louvred glass panels and it was heated by water that ran from huge tanks through copper pipes under the floor. Like a circulatory system tempering the weather, the water generated congenial conditions like those in warmer climes. In this way, the original Crystal Palace could be seen as metonymic of steam power, the driver of the industrial colonisation of the world. Significantly the work also questions the pervasiveness of colonisation processes that fix and pre-condition anything – territories, people, animals – with expectations and constructions obfuscating any nuanced difference or singularity in the colonised. Henderson's work responds to these aspects through moving sculptural forms, materials and contained objects offering a 'promenade' through constructed passageways.

Brigid Noone

Brigid Noone's wall painting *Exotic sorrows* (2013) reproduces the 'colonial style' painting *The Empress Eugénie Surrounded by her Ladies in Waiting* (1855) by Franz Xaver Winterhalter (Germany, 1805-1875) and incorporates two niches containing mineral specimens under bell jars. Sitting in a garden in lavish gowns, the women depicted in the painting have been altered through applied markings painted on the exposed flesh of their faces and hands.

Noone's inspiration for this work is the idea of connecting sorrow to the Other. She suggests that one aspect of this is the archiving of the Other. The incorporation of objects within the purpose-built wall was instigated in response to documentation of tree-life within the original Crystal Palace, as depicted by Christopher Hobhouse. One of the niches contains small cubes of pyrite (commonly known as fool's gold) and, in the other niche, a mineral that resembles a pink, soft explosion. The specimens were selected by the artist on a visit to the Mineral Collection of the South Australian Museum. The pairing of pink and gold has become a visual philosophy, or love code, within Noone's practice, coming into focus through her relationship and artistic collaborations with her husband, Ben Leslie. The idea of sorrow and exoticisation, she suggests, connects to our difficult colonial past and shared melancholia; institutions such as the Crystal Palace highlight the positioning of a 'cultural artefact', depicting the perceived exotic as Other. The bell jars reference the containment of nature as a potential specimen that could be positioned in the future as Other. The connection of 'women as Other' and the applied markings that suggest this, does relate – indirectly – to Indigenous marking systems, but more specifically to a generic, or abstract, sense of marking itself, or 'what marks us'. Sorrow, and being perceived as Other, is a complex human intersection highlighted with tenderness and awareness through Noone's work.

Lee Salomone

Lee Salomone's work alludes to the intimate relationship between plants and humans. With a lifelong interest in plants and the cultivation of food – nurtured as family inheritance – and over a twenty-year arts practice, he has drawn inspiration from nature: her colours, forms and cycles. Salomone's family took part in the post World War II urbanisation of Australia. The direct link in Italian rural village existence between plants as food, medicine and craft was replaced by urban culture, and the values and skills brought into the new country by these immigrants were devalued in the process. Salomone has responded to the Museum of Economic Botany's collection, which demonstrates diversity in plants and their central role in our lives.

Zappa botanica (2013) combines collected hoes, glass and bronze seedpods as emblems of the practical relationship that his family has to the cycles of nature. The bronze cast leaves in *Bohemia* (2013) are from the Australian native tree, *Bauhinia cunninghamii*, each centred on a metal saucepan lid. The original leaves were gathered from a garden Salomone works in. There are dualities at play in *Bohemia*: found object practice versus hand-crafted bronze process, nature versus culture, and female domesticity versus male manufacturing. Salomone cites the Aboriginal uses of *Bauhinia cunninghamii*: "windbreaks in the dry season... smokeless firewood... Aboriginal people eat the sweet gum, suck the nectar from the flowers, use the bark and wood to treat headache, as an antiseptic and as a remedy for fever." Theoretically *Bohemia* makes use of anthropologist and theorist Claude Lévi-Strauss's idea that "the raw is the realm of nature as humans find it and the cooked is the realm of culture, nature metamorphosed."

Sera Waters

Sera Waters' sculptural embroidered works include a cross-section of a megafauna kangaroo-tail, encased within layers of gum-tree stump, holding and held by, a 'finite universe', displayed in a glass museum case; and a series of small illuminated 'mineral' sculptures suspended within the gallery's temporary constructed walls. Waters has also composed a 'colour chart' of South Australian minerals encased in an adjacent display. Her works refer, formally and conceptually, to other objects and artworks installed within nearby niches: Albert Namatjira's kangaroo and emu wooden plaque, George French Angas' *South Australia Illustrated* (opened to his depiction of the volcanic area around Mt Schank); and various wood specimens including colonial turned artefacts.

Waters' work responds to 'local' events (South Australia, Australia, planet Earth, the Universe). They coalesce around the idea of layers, or particularly 'layerscapes', imagining our 'present' as one layer, sitting atop countless others, continuing to a central point; much like a diagram of the Earth. Each layer of these scapes, though buried, carries evidence of experiences, exposures and events. While the surface gets most of our attention, there are often resurfacing reminders of the layers hidden beneath: diamonds blasted from the hot depths of the earth, intentional or incidental erosion, a ghostly presence 'felt' rising, or narratives continued and adapted across eras. While layerscapes are undoubtedly geographical, they also occur concentrated within trees, minerals, stalactites, our bodies, and in the built-up cultural interconnections between people across generations. Waters' work re-imagines evidence from our complex local layerscapes, visually rich with minerals, lives now passed, inherited histories and more. They offer a response to a number of works in the collections; in their layered appearance and the story they build together about the richness of South Australia – geographically, historically, and culturally.