

Greer Honeywill essay for Flinders Lane Gallery

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Greer Honeywill's artistic career to date is a powerful commentary on the uneasy relationship that Australians have with the myriad physical and psychological dimensions associated with the place we call home. References to the material culture of everyday life are worked and reworked into beautiful and haunting installations which challenge us to acknowledge that beneath the veneer of respectability, suburban dreams may eventually play havoc with our interior lives.

Honeywill is a contemporary weaver of everyday dreams creating patterns from pieces of information she carefully collects and files from her endless observations of every day life. The physical and the phenomenological aspects of her work are then overlaid with the dimension of time and in doing so she reveals the inescapable sense of loss, yearning and search for identity that characterises contemporary society. In her storytelling she embraces traditional and modern construction materials, found objects, digital technology, textiles and applied art techniques, often working collaboratively with the skills of artisans in order to access a particular technique.

The spaces we live in actively encourage or prevent the flow of movement and communication between inhabitants. The simple lines of a floor plan are in fact powerful determinants of behaviour, which calls to mind the actions of Lars von Trier's characters in the film 'Dogville' (2003), stiffened by the two-dimensional borders of their imaginary dwellings. Honeywill's own research led her to Howland, Deery and Owen's 1885 plans for a kitchenless apartment building. In the house form of *Elysium* (2007) the apartment floor plan is hidden within the delicately pierced surface of the walls and roof. Honeywill created the pattern by injecting the disorder of real life into the idealised plan by subjecting it to a randomising computer program. This piece at once leads us to remembrance of a childhood doll's house, a scene of child's play embodying the learning of future roles and routines. *Elysium* screens our imaginings of the life inside, providing

only a tiny doorway suggesting a self-contained and closed community, disconnected from the outside world.

Virginia Woolf's, 'angel in the house', continues to exist, nowhere more obvious than in the commodification of home cooking, where celebrity cooks such as Nigella Lawson, have glamourised perfect meals and family life. This is a far cry from Honeywill's memory of her mother, preparing wholesome food within a limited repertoire of recipes assembled by the Country Women's Association. This questioning of not only domestic labour, but constant consumerism, has been teased out in a number of works. *Untitled*, 2007, enshrines the 20th century's equivalent of the 'cabinet of curiosities' – the kitchen cabinet. Like the family, the kitchen cabinet is always hungry. Text from Honeywill's archive of shopping list books documenting nearly three decades is suspended on a transparent Perspex plane in front of the cabinet. These lines of simple grocery items cast shadows over the cabinet's whiteness, inscribing the façade with the memory of repeated shopping expeditions.

Within this corpus of work, the apparent transparency of the home has been explored repeatedly through the literal and metaphoric forms of the cage and the timber house frame. These enclosures offer the subtle tension between freedom and confinement, opportunity and security. Honeywill's ephemeral installation work for the 2008 Montalto Sculpture Prize, *Architecture of the Heart*, 2008, placed the birdcage in the liminal space between abandonment and reclamation. Sited in an amphitheatre-like glade, the collection of one hundred bruised and rusting metal cages settled into the earth as if to disappear, while the multi-storied nature of the work attracted the curiosity of local birds, perhaps for their dwelling possibilities. As with many of Honeywill's works, this installation responds deeply to the qualities of light and shade in which it is placed, be that a gallery or a garden. Her structures invite quiet contemplation, yet the mixture of joy and sadness they rouse makes them akin to an anthem.

Patterns are repetitive by nature: attractive and alluring at first, but monotonous over time. *Variations on Monotony*, 2007 draws widely on the patterns of access and egress related to the fatal magnetism of our cities and employs motifs from the Melways guide

to place. Hundreds of fillets of finely cut wood, like a learning game for children, stack to make a fictitious city skyline hovering above a grid of suburban streets. This work speaks of the constrictions of urban life, where each of us strives to keep a sense of individuality as we deal with the mundane.

Most recently Honeywill's work explores the promise of greater societal good offered by modernist architecture of the 20th century. She interrogates what the modernists themselves were often blind to: that their noble ambitions would be largely 'lost in translation' when multiplied and standardised to accommodate suburban realities. The work, *Shadowboxing*, 2008, features a series of repeated white box and frame assemblages, which are strung together and towed forward, as if into the future, by a battered, once loved, toy scooter. The frames and their pattern of compartments are miniature versions of the sea-side façade of Paul Rudolph's, Milam House (1959-1961), built in Ponte Vedra, Florida. Honeywill was drawn to the façade of this house because it reminded her of the shadow boxes found in ordinary homes in the 1950s and 60s. Once again, Honeywill employs the shadow, and its connotations of the 'other self' with bold dreams and dark thoughts, to engage with her audience

The home and suburbia have long been viewed as things which can be branded and purchased from a catalogue with the marketing expectation that happiness will be delivered and all dreams can be 'accommodated' in the dwelling. Vitruvius expounded three principles to guide the best architecture, translated as *firmness, commodity and delight*. Honeywill constantly queries the reality of such principles: are our houses 'fit' for our desires and conversely, can we fit our growing material and emotional needs into suburban life? We have not begun to reign in our quest to consume land and trees for family life. For our collective survival, can we afford not to?

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